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FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO COOK

DECEMBER 2006 NO. 82

how to roast a perfect prime rib

**make-and-
freeze
appetizers**

**authentic
lasagne**

**4 ways to
cook green
beans**

**weeknight
chicken
braises**



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then slow-roast**

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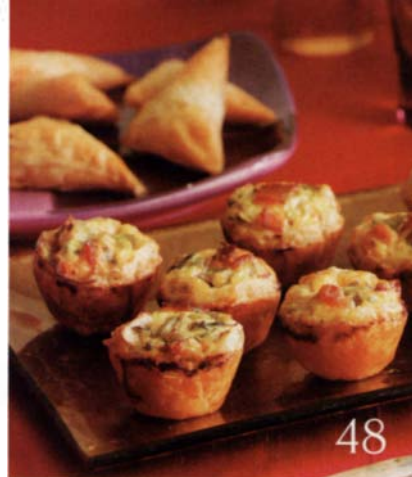
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from 12 years



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- ◆ QUICK
Under 45 minutes
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Can be completely prepared ahead but may need reheating and a garnish to serve
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Can be partially prepared ahead but will need a few finishing touches before serving
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May contain eggs and dairy ingredients

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Entertaining ideas for any holiday occasion

There's a lot more to holiday entertaining than Christmas dinner. It's the endless stream of other little events—the neighbors who drop by for cocktails and linger long into the night, the out-of-town relatives, the weekend guests, the open-house—that can take a toll on even the most resourceful cook. But don't worry: We'll see you through. For a truly spectacular meal, don't miss award-winning chef Suzanne Goin's festive menu on p. 40; it has a timeline so you can go all out without stressing out. And if you want to keep things low-key, the no-fuss holiday menu (far right, top) is sophisticated but not at all difficult. We've also pulled together several other ideas for any occasion the season might bring.

Be sure to check the yield on each recipe, as you may need to adjust it to suit your needs.

A light brunch buffet

This brunch is do-able because the recipes let you get a big head-start. The tart can be assembled well in advance, frozen, and then baked right before serving time. And the ginger cake can be made several days ahead. If needed, add a bowl of mixed fresh fruit to the spread, and you'll be all set.

Sun-Dried Tomato Tart with
Fontina & Prosciutto,
p. 94a

Arugula, Mint & Apple Salad
with Walnuts &
Buttermilk Dressing,
p. 43

Double-Ginger Pound Cake
with Brown Sugar Mascarpone
Whipped Cream,
p. 64

No-fuss holiday dinner

This sweet little menu feels special—no one will ever guess how easy it is to pull together. If you'd rather serve beef, feel free to substitute the Slow-Roasted Prime Rib, p. 44.

Roasted Cornish Game Hens
with Pesto & Goat Cheese,
p. 94a

Orange-Scented Rice Pilaf
with Fennel,
p. 94a

Roasted Carrots & Shallots
with Oil-Cured Olives
& Gremolata,
p. 46

Almond Biscotti, p. 14a,
with Vin Santo,
a Tuscan dessert wine

Weeknight company

With these dishes stashed in your freezer, entertaining drop-in guests is a simple matter of heat and serve. (Or in the case of the granita, scrape and serve.) If you happen to have a loaf of crusty bread on hand, it would make a nice addition.

A mixed green salad with
a simple vinaigrette

Spinach & Ricotta Lasagne,
p. 70

Clementine Granita,
p. 21

Casual entertaining for a crowd

To round out the meal, simply set out a loaf or two of warm, crusty bread and a few bottles of Chianti Classico.

Arugula & Radicchio Salad with Ruby
Grapefruit & Toasted Almonds,
p. 94a

Beef & Pork Ragù Lasagne,
p. 68

Caramel Turtle Bars, p. 74, and
Cranberry Streusel Shortbread Bars,
p. 75

Post-holiday supper

If roast beef was on your holiday menu, then here's a way to use up your leftovers in inspired fashion.

Prime Rib Sandwiches with
Roasted Garlic Dijonnaise,
p. 78

Green Beans with Tarragon-
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Chewy Cranberry-Oatmeal
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from the editor

Meet the Cookies

Here at The Taunton Press, we publish magazines for people who are passionate about their craft (you probably already knew that). Our job is to help bring you the experts' advice, right from the horse's mouth. At *Fine Cooking*, that means we seek out opinionated, articulate chefs, foodwriters, and food experts to share their expertise. And then we create a magazine that can clearly convey that wisdom to you. I thought you might like to know how all of us get involved in that process.

First, the editors meet to brainstorm an "issue plan"—an interesting lineup of story ideas for a given season. Next, the story editors (Kim M., Rebecca, and Laura) set out to find the perfect author for each feature. Once the author's on board, the story editor meets with the executive editor (Sarah) or the chief editor (me) to talk about what angle feels right, based on the author's point of view and the issue mix. Is it a menu, a technique story, an ingredient story, a new cuisine?

Next stop: The art directors. Steve and Annie get involved pretty early in the process, talking with the editors about the "look and feel" of each story, doing exploratory layouts, and figuring out how many pages the story wants.

When authors deliver recipes, that's when our test kitchen manager, Jen, gets involved. Once she's tested the recipes thoroughly (yes, she's on her feet a lot), a photo shoot is scheduled. Scott, our photographer, and Allison, our food stylist, are on hand for every shoot, along with the editor and art director working on the story. And for one or two stories in each issue, we go on location to shoot with the author.

Once the photos are shot (and layouts finalized), editors "loop" their stories (text and recipes) to Sarah to read, and then to Enid for expert copy editing. The stories then go back to the authors for a last look. Meanwhile, Kim L., our editorial assistant, is gathering the nutrition information for each recipe and fact-checking sources.

Finally, we have a "layout review" meeting where Maria, our publisher, has a chance to look at the features and the cover and to give us constructive feedback. A few tweaks, one last round of proofing, and down goes the "book" to the color and production centers (here at Taunton). There, our pages join with the advertising pages according to a "map" that Steve has created. The entire book is then available in an electronic version for one last look before the files go off to the printer.

We're always relieved to see an issue go—and always excited to hold it in our hands when it comes back all bound up a few weeks later. We feel so lucky to have such satisfying jobs that we thought we'd take the opportunity this holiday season not only to wish you a safe, healthy, and delicious holiday, but also to say thank you for letting us do what we love.

—Susie Middleton, editor

P.S. Keep a batch of my easy butter-roasted almonds on hand for holiday drop-ins.



Our new tradition (started last year) is an annual staff photo. Here's the gang of "Cookies," from the middle, clockwise: Annie (on stool), Rebecca, Kim L., Laura (on floor), Enid, Jennifer, Kim M., Susie, Maria (on ladder), Sarah J., Steve, and Allison. Not pictured: Scott, who took the picture, and new arrival, Sarah B.



Butter-Roasted Almonds

Yields about 2¼ cups.

These nuts are a deliciously simple snack, nibble, appetizer, or salad addition.

2 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 tsp. kosher salt
2 tsp. granulated sugar
12 oz. whole raw skin-on almonds (about 2¼ cups)
1 to 2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil

Heat the oven to 400°F. In a small saucepan over low heat, melt the butter with 1 tsp. of the salt and the sugar, stirring. Put the almonds in a mixing bowl, scrape the butter mixture into the bowl, and toss thoroughly to coat.

Scrape the almonds and anything remaining in the bowl onto a large rimmed baking sheet. Spread evenly. Roast until fragrant and darkened to a rich brown, 11 to 13 minutes (any exposed almond meat should be a deep golden brown). Be sure not to undercook; roasting thoroughly will dry them out all the way through and ensure that they're crunchy, not chewy.

Remove from the oven and drizzle with a little of the olive oil and toss with the remaining 1 tsp. salt. Let cool completely (they will get crunchier as they cool). Scrape the almonds and all the contents of the pan (there will be some yummy brown stuff) into an airtight container and store in the refrigerator for a week to 10 days.



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from our readers

Metric, please

While reading your July issue (*Fine Cooking* #79), it suddenly dawned on me that the weight measurements in your recipes were only in ounces. "What's wrong with that?" I hear you say. Well, nothing—for American readers. But here in Canada we've been using the metric system for most things for some time.

Some items, like butter, are packaged in pounds but labeled in grams. My electronic kitchen scale, which I use more and more often, measures in both ounces and grams. I always use grams, as it's much more exact.

Would it be a huge burden for *Fine Cooking* to use both ounces and grams in its recipes, for example 1 oz./28 gr.? After all, you do have a huge Canadian subscribership, I'm sure. Besides, the United States might eventually catch up to most of the rest of the world and convert to metric, and *Fine Cooking* would have done its bit to prepare the general populace. It was a difficult transition for Canadians, especially the oldies among us, but metric is ever so much more sensible.

—Hilary Johnston, via email

Editors' reply: We have to hand it to you Canadian readers: Not only are you passionate cooks, but you pick up your pens and write to us frequently with your opinions—thank you. We wish we could publish a Canadian issue just for you, but alas, we hope you can make do with those electric scales (with ounces) for now. If we added any more words to our already very detailed recipes, we'd wind up having to make the pages longer or wider or the print too small to read.

Striking gold in a back issue

I just wanted to thank you for a wonderful Web site and magazine. I had had Indian flatbreads on my mind ever since I had lunch at our local Indian restaurant. Being a cookbook junkie, I thought that for sure I'd have a recipe at home. I had one, tried it, and wanted to find something better.

I have subscribed to *Fine Cooking* for many years—and love it—but didn't want to take the time to look through all of my back issues. So off to your Web site I went and within minutes found an article, "Tandoor-Style Flatbreads from Your Own Oven," from issue #47, and as luck would have it I had that issue on the shelf. Tomorrow I will try one of the flatbreads, and because roast chicken was on my menu anyway, I will try your recipe that was featured on the cover of the same issue. How is that for synchronicity?

—Carol Wilcox Wells, via email

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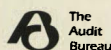
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With her stash of frozen hors d'oeuvre in the freezer, **Kate Hays** can entertain guests on a moment's notice. This season, she shares some of her make-and-freeze appetizers in her story on p. 48. The chef-owner of Dish Catering in Shelburne, Vermont, Kate has cooked professionally in the Burlington area for almost 20 years. She also does freelance recipe testing, development, and food styling.



Kate Hays



Joyce Goldstein



Suzanne Goin

Frequent *Fine Cooking* contributor **Nicole Rees** ("Bar Cookies," p. 72) is a baker and food scientist. She started baking at age 8 because there were no tasty treats in the house, and her sweet tooth continues to inspire her creations today. Before moving to Portland, Oregon, five years ago, she worked as a food editor and recipe developer at several national magazines. Nicole is the co-author (with Joseph Amendola) of *The Baker's Manual* and *Understanding Baking*.

Ris Lacoste ("Green Beans," p. 52) has been a professional chef for nearly 25 years. She has come up through the ranks at several Massachusetts and D.C. restaurants, finally landing at 1789 Restaurant in Georgetown, where she was executive chef for 10 years. She recently left 1789 to pursue her dream of opening her own restaurant.

Contributing editor **Abigail Johnson Dodge** ("Dessert Party," p. 60) offers a holiday entertaining idea: a buffet made up entirely of sweet treats. Not only is it a great excuse to polish your silver and get out the good china, but it's easy to pull off, too, because all the recipes can be made ahead. Abby is the author of many cookbooks, including *Great Fruit Desserts* and *The Weekend Baker*. She was also the founding director of *Fine Cooking's* test kitchen.

Jennifer McLagan ("Chicken Braises," p. 56) knows a thing or two about braising. Her award-winning cookbook, *Bones*, is all about slow-cooking chicken, meat, and fish on the bone. The braised chicken leg recipes she gave us are wonderful examples of how rich and tasty meat on the bone can be. A native Australian, Jennifer has 30 years of experience as a chef, food stylist, and writer. She now lives in Toronto, with occasional escapes to France.

Joyce Goldstein ("Lasagne," p. 67) has been making lasagne since her children were little (now they have kids of their own). An award-winning chef, a prolific cookbook author, and a cooking teacher with more than 35 years of experience, Joyce is one of the foremost experts on Italian cooking in this country. Her many cookbooks include *Italian Slow and Savory*, *Enoteca: Simple, Delicious Recipes in the Italian Wine Bar Tradition*, and her latest, *Antipasti*.

Growing up in a food-obsessed family, **Suzanne Goin** ("Prime Rib," p. 40) was eating at Michelin-starred restaurants and helping her parents prepare gargantuan family feasts at an age when most kids are playing with dolls and toy trains. A self-taught chef, Suzanne has worked in some of the country's most renowned restaurants, including Al Forno in Providence, Rhode Island, and Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. In 1998 she opened her own restaurant, Lucques, in Los Angeles, followed by AOC wine bar in 2002. In 2006, she won two James Beard awards: one for best California chef and one for her first cookbook, *Sunday Suppers at Lucques*.



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Sweet Talk

Attention bakers: For whipping up delicious holiday treats, here's the lowdown on some of our favorite new baking gear.

BY REBECCA FREEDMAN



A new line of heavy-duty bakeware

In the market for some basic equipment? Check out Anolon's new line of commercial-style bakeware, which includes rimmed sheet pans, muffin tins, cookie sheets, round and square cake pans, and more. They're sturdy, reliable, and best of all, reasonably priced. *Anolon commercial bakeware, from \$12 at PotsAndPans.com (800-450-0156).*



Goodbye cookie cutter clutter

We love to bake cookies at this time of year. What we don't love is the scattered mess of cookie cutters in our kitchen drawers. So when we recently discovered Cuisipro's new cutters, we were so glad: They snap together neatly and compactly, keeping us just a little more organized. Though made of plastic, they're still plenty sharp. *Cuisipro cookie cutters, \$9.95 per five-piece set at Cooking.com (800-663-8810).*



Separate eggs in a flash

With this handy little tool, our eggs separated in an instant, and much more neatly than they did when we used the shell or our hands. Just stretch the extendable wire arms across a small bowl or liquid measuring cup and crack away. *Amco extendable egg separator, \$9.95 at CutleryAndMore.com.*

For mini tarts, a four-in-one solution

We're partial to tartlets because they're elegant and impressive, but there's one caveat: because they're small and you're likely to bake several at a time, they can be fussy to maneuver in and out of the oven. That's why we've taken to this pan from Chicago Metallic. It holds four mini tartlets, each with a removable bottom, so you'll get great results without the hassle of juggling multiple tins. *Chicago Metallic tartlet pan, \$25 at Amazon.com.*

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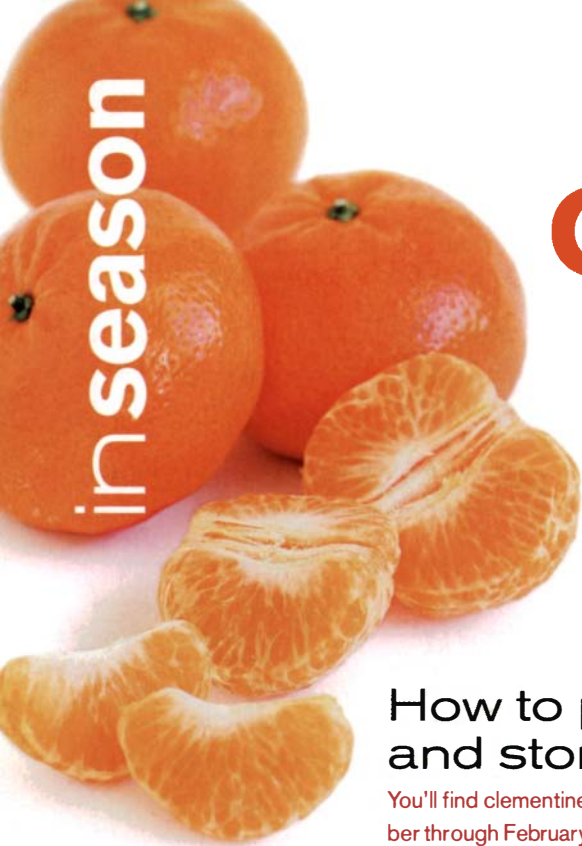
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Clementines

Not Just for Snacking

BY RUTH LIVELY

How to pick and store

You'll find clementines from October through February. Choose fruits that are intact and firm, heavy for their size, and deeply colored. But don't avoid fruits that have a slight green cast—they'll color quickly. Stored at room temperature with good air circulation, clementines keep several days to a week. Turning them and, even more important, keeping a little space between fruits, helps prevent mold from setting in. For longer keeping, stash them in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator.

I like all kinds of fruit, but when it comes to citrus, clementines are—well, yes—my darlings. These diminutive fruits have a thin skin that peels off easily, making them ideal for a quick mid-afternoon snack. I love their juicy, sweet flesh, which is just a little more acidic than that of oranges, and their wonderful floral scent.

By most accounts, clementines are the result of a cross between a mandarin and an orange that occurred at the beginning of the 20th century in the Algerian garden of a French missionary, Clement Rodier. Virtually unknown in this country 25 years ago, clementines are now the most popular mandarin-type citrus on the market. Much of the world production is concentrated in Spain and Morocco (South Africa and Israel are also big producers), but more and more citrus farms in California are being converted from oranges to clementines. Most of the

clementines available in the United States are rather small, but larger varieties exist.

Use the whole fruit

Although snacking on ripe clementines dripping with juice is one of the best things winter can offer, this fruit is wonderful in recipes, too. As with other citrus, the flesh, the juice, and the zest can all contribute their delicious perfumed flavor to a dish.

I use the zest and juice in sauces for meat or fish and in braises. Or I use them to make refreshing clementine sorbets or granitas (see the recipe at right). A little zest gives a tantalizing flavor to vinaigrettes, homemade garlic mayonnaise, and marinades for meat, and it adds zing to a boring bowl of supermarket olives.

Sectioned or sliced clementines are a fresh addition to winter salads. They are also lovely poached, used as a tart topping, or in a compote with other fruit.

Savory ways with clementines

Make a tempting winter salad of endive, frisée, or radicchio (or a mix), and clementine sections and toss with a vinaigrette made with a little clementine juice. Top with a thin slab of Roquefort and some toasted almonds.

For a tangy clementine sauce, simmer and reduce clementine juice by half, add just a touch of white wine vinegar and a little lemon juice. Season and serve over steamed vegetables, such as asparagus or artichokes.

Jazz up a salad of bulgur, orzo, or wild rice with chopped clementines, scallions, toasted pecans, and lots of parsley. Dress it with a vinaigrette made with olive oil and lemon and clementine juices.

Give an unexpected twist to a pot roast or braised short ribs by adding the juice of one clementine and a little grated zest when you begin the braise.

Perk up winter squash or red pepper soup with clementine juice and grated zest.

They're great in desserts, too

For a sweet garnish, poach clementine sections and zest in a heavy syrup of 2 parts sugar to 1 part water until soft and tender, then cool and store in the syrup. Use as a garnish for cheesecake or a dense chocolate cake.

Try a warm gratin of clementines with zabaglione. Pour a Grand Marnier-flavored zabaglione (custard sauce) over clementine sections in a shallow ovenproof dish and run under the broiler for a few minutes to brown the top.

For a zesty compote, simmer clementine sections with pear and apple slices in a light syrup of 1 part sugar to 2 parts water (perhaps using white or sweet wine for part of the liquid), a vanilla bean, star anise or cardamom, and a strip of clementine zest, until the fruit is tender. Let cool in the syrup. Serve with pound cake or over vanilla ice cream.

Make a citrusy upside-down cake using clementine sections. Add a little zest to the batter, if you wish.



Clementine Granita

Yields about 1 quart; serves four.

Although a frozen dessert might not be your first thought for deep winter, I assure you this granita is a refreshingly light and delightful finish to a rich winter meal. And it's a snap to make.

3/4 cup granulated sugar
2 Tbs. finely chopped clementine zest
 (from 2 to 3 medium clementines)
Kosher salt
3 cups fresh clementine juice, with pulp
 (from 18 to 20 medium clementines or about 4 lb.)

In a small saucepan, stir together the sugar, zest, a pinch of salt, and 3/4 cup water. Bring to a boil over medium heat and cook, stirring, until the sugar dissolves and the syrup is clear, about 2 minutes. Set aside to cool slightly as you juice the clementines.

Stir the juice and syrup together, pour into a small metal pan, such as a loaf pan, cover with plastic, and freeze for 2 hours. Stir the mixture with a spoon, breaking up the portions that have become solid, and return to the freezer. Stir every 30 minutes until the mixture is evenly icy and granular, about 2 hours more.

Cover and return to the freezer until ready to serve. The granita may be made up to one week ahead. To serve, scrape with a spoon to loosen the mixture, and spoon into small bowls or glasses.

tip

If you have an ice cream freezer, this recipe works equally well as a sorbet.

Ruth Lively cooks, writes, and gardens in New Haven, Connecticut. ♦

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What are some good uses for leftover red or white wine? And how should I store it?

—Noah Weiss, Stamford, Connecticut

A Allison Ehri responds: I use a vacuum stopper to seal a bottle of leftover wine (editors' note: for other options, see *Enjoying Wine*, p. 26). It will keep in the refrigerator for up to three days for drinking and up to two weeks for cooking. Try any of these easy ways to use it up:

- Make a marinade for beef, lamb, duck, or game by combining leftover red wine, chopped garlic, olive oil, and black pepper.

- Use leftover red wine for a great pan sauce for steaks or lamb chops. When your meat is done, transfer it to a plate to rest. Wipe out any excess fat from the pan and cook some finely chopped shallots and garlic in a little butter. Pour in the red wine, scrape the browned bits from the bottom of the pan, and simmer briskly until the sauce is slightly thickened and just coats the back of a spoon. Remove from the heat, pour in any meat juices accumulated on the plate, and swirl in a tablespoon of butter.

- Use leftover white wine to deglaze a pan of sautéed mushrooms, onions, greens, shrimp, or chicken. Just pour it in with the sautéed ingredients, scrape the browned bits from the bottom of the pan, and cook until the wine has almost evaporated.

Allison Ehri is Fine Cooking's test kitchen associate and food stylist.

I recently read a recipe that said to butter a cake pan, then line the bottom with a parchment circle. Isn't a parchment liner redundant after buttering?

—Anne Dubin, via email

A Abigail Johnson Dodge responds: In most cases, buttering the bottom of a baking pan (or greasing it with cooking spray) alone doesn't ensure a clean release, nor does greasing and flouring the pan. Using a parchment circle or a reusable silicone liner is as close to a guarantee as you can get that your cake won't stick. The coating of butter or spray also ensures that the parch-

ment liner will stay in place—no sliding to one side and no curling up—when the batter is added and spread evenly into the pan.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is a contributing editor and the author of The Weekend Baker.

Picking fresh thyme leaves one by one is a tedious job. Is there a way to do it faster?

—Al Sevcik, Houston, Texas

A Lynne Sampson responds: There's a much faster way: Don't pick but strip the thyme leaves from their woody stems. Hold the sprig in one hand and use the fingers of the other hand to slide down the stem, stripping off the tiny thyme leaves.

It doesn't matter whether you strip from base to tip or tip to base; either will work. Some of the thyme's tender, green stems will break off along with the leaves; simply chop these up with the leaves, and they won't even be noticed.

It's not always necessary to destem thyme leaves. When making stews, braises, soups, or other long-cooking dishes, you can just throw in whole thyme sprigs. The leaves will fall off during cooking, and you can extract the woody stem before serving.

Lynne Sampson, formerly a chef at The Herbfarm restaurant near Seattle, is a food writer and cooking teacher.

What is tawny port?

—Pam Kilker, via email

A Tim Gaiser responds: There are two major categories of the sweet Portuguese dessert wine known as port: ruby and tawny. These names refer to the color of the wine, which is a result of how long it's been aged in oak casks. Ruby port has a deeper, more youthful color than tawny port and can spend from two to six years in the barrel, depending on the specific wine. Tawny port is a light to medium tawny brown and spends far more time in the cask, between 10 and 40 years.

While many ruby ports require further aging in your cellar after purchase (from 2 to 25 years), all tawny ports can be used upon their release into the marketplace. Enjoy the spicy flavor of tawny port with chocolate and chocolate desserts as well as with salty blue cheeses like Stilton.

Tim Gaiser is a contributing editor and a master sommelier. ♦

Have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by email to fcqa@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

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Sparkling cider from handpicked apples



shiny, perfect apples we see at the market. Instead, they were small, ugly, and gnarled, with obscure names like Brown Snout and Foxwhelp, and so bitter they were practically inedible. It's heirloom varieties like these, says Kristin, that make the best cider apples, because they have more tannins and higher acidity than sweet eating apples.

When she and Rich (above) bought this piece of land in 1992, they

wanted to turn it into a winery. They quickly discovered that the soil was ill suited for a vineyard, but it was perfect for apple orchards. Hard cider seemed a natural choice.

Ten years in the making

Kristin spent months researching rare apple varieties traditionally used for cider making in France and England. Then she and Rich worked for years to develop a blend that balanced the apples' sweet, bitter, and sharp flavors. In 2001, the first vintage of their Ford Farms Cyderworks Oregon Dry Sparkling Hard Cider, made from nearly 30 varieties grown on their orchard, was finally ready.



The Fords pick their apples by hand each fall. They wash and press the apples at the peak of ripeness and freeze the juice until all the fruit has been pressed. Rich, who handles the cider making with the zeal and earnestness of a winemaker, explained that he ferments the blend in stainless-steel tanks first. Then, using the traditional French method, he bottles the cider, adding yeast and sugar. This initiates a second fermentation, which produces natural carbonation with bubbles similar to Champagne's. The result is an utterly enjoyable sparkler that's light years from commercial hard ciders. Dry and crisp with just a little tartness, it's excellent with cheese, seafood, and chicken.

The Fords bottle only about 1,000 cases of their bubbly each harvest. They distribute it exclusively to stores and restaurants around Portland. *For more information or to mail order, visit www.cyderworks.com or call the farm at 503-621-3908.* ♦

BY LAURA GIANNATEMPO

Just a short drive outside Portland, Oregon, the bustle of the city fades into the peaceful quiet of Sauvie Island, a beautiful agricultural and wildlife area rimmed by the Columbia River and the Multnomah Channel. When I drove there to visit Kristin and Rich Ford's farm, thin banks of fog hovered low over the fields and clung to the fruit trees, from time to time exposing patches of bright blue sky beyond.

The first thing that caught my eye when I arrived at the 25-acre farm was the long, neat rows of handsome apple trees. But upon closer inspection, I saw that these trees didn't bear the plump,



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Choosing Wine Gear You'll Really Use

BY TIM GAISER

It's true that you need nothing more than a corkscrew and a glass to enjoy a bottle of wine. But that raises the question: which corkscrew and which glass? There's no shortage of options. You don't have to look very hard to find a dizzying assortment of gorgeous, steeply priced,

and often impractical wine doodads—I personally have plenty of fancy wine tools that don't do anything but collect dust. Truth is, the wine accessories I use on a regular basis are decidedly not fancy; in fact, most of them are outright bargains. Here they are:

Decanters

Decanters are a must for separating the sediment from older red wines and aerating young bottles of red wine to soften the tannins and make them more enjoyable. Decanters can be plain, ornate, or oddly shaped. Riedel's Cabernet decanter offers the best of all worlds with its elegant design and functional shape, plus it's very affordable. The 37½-ounce model is \$39, and the 64-ounce model is \$64.50 at 67wine.com (888-671-6767).

Corkscrews

There are hundreds of kinds but only two that I use:

The Pull Tab (far left) is my go-to corkscrew. I use it 99.9% of the time, as do most of the wine pros I know. It has a handle that fits well in most hands, a Teflon-coated auger for ease of use, and a two-level hinge that will remove any cork easily (provided you pull straight up). And it's only \$8.99 at ChefDepot.net (630-434-7768).

Screwpull's table model (left) could be the ultimate corkscrew. Even a novice can use this corkscrew without struggling. And it works even on those bottles with brittle, crumbly corks, so it's a lifesaver when you're opening an old bottle of wine from the cellar. It's \$19.95 at lwaWine.com (800-527-4072).

Preservers & stain removers

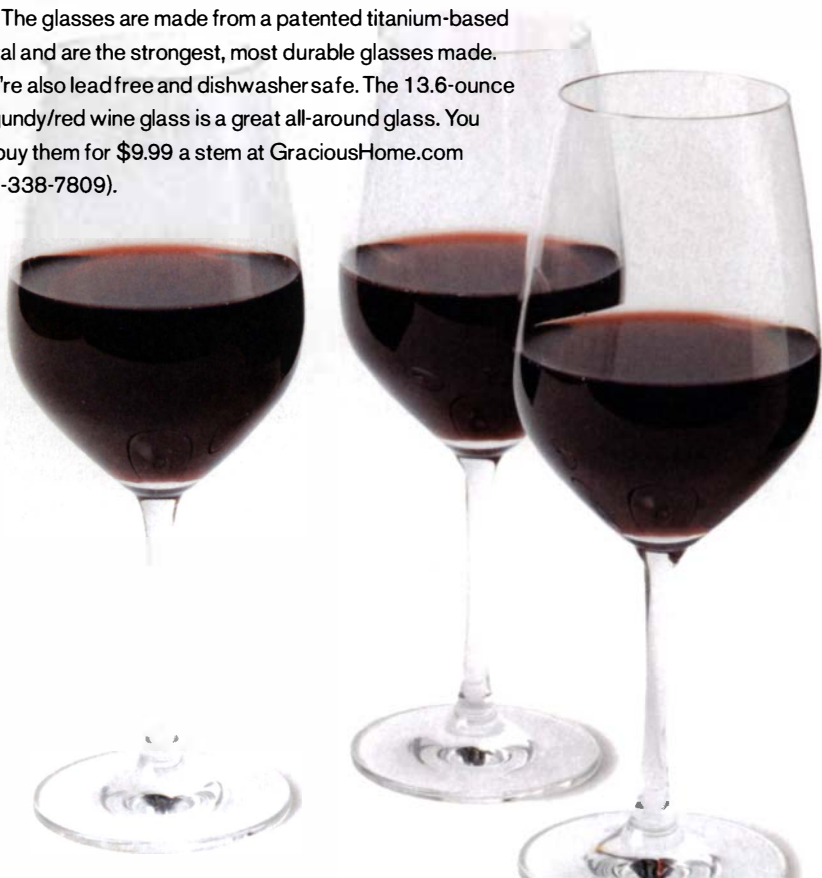
There are many wine preservation techniques on the market, and I've tried practically all of them over the years. But none is better than **Private Preserve**, one of the first products designed to preserve an open bottle of wine. A single canister can be used to preserve approximately 120 bottles of wine for two to three days and costs just \$9.95 at lwaWine.com (800-527-4072).

You've probably learned the hard way: Never wear white to a wine tasting. But if tragedy occurs, fear not. **Wine Away** can remove red wine stains from most fabrics and carpeting. It's truly amazing stuff, and no wine lover should be without it. A gift pack that includes a 12-ounce bottle, a 2-ounce travel-size bottle, and six little pocket packets is \$15 at EvergreenLabs.com/shopping (888-946-3292).



Glasses

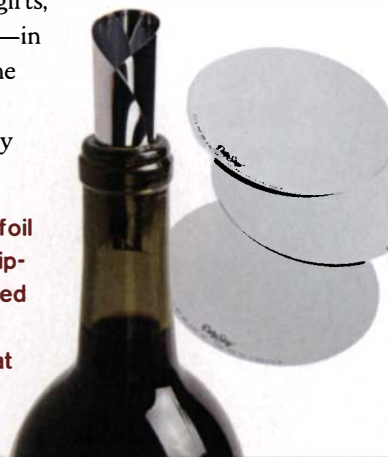
Tritan Forté, an amazing new line of wine glasses from Austrian crystal maker Schott Zwiesel, is the most revolutionary development in glassware design in many a year. The glasses are made from a patented titanium-based crystal and are the strongest, most durable glasses made. They're also lead free and dishwasher safe. The 13.6-ounce Burgundy/red wine glass is a great all-around glass. You can buy them for \$9.99 a stem at GraciousHome.com (800-338-7809).



Stocking stuffers

When it comes to wine gifts, sometimes the smallest—in size and in price—are the most valuable. Here are a few wee items for every wine lover on your list.

Drop Stops are slim foil discs that guarantee drip-proof pouring when rolled up and inserted in any bottle. Three for \$6.99 at WineCellarsOnline.com (888-239-5705).



Zyliss bottle stoppers

are great to have on hand for recorking half-full bottles of wine. Because they form an air-tight, leak-proof seal in the mouth of the bottle, they're much more effective than the original cork. And it's hard to find a better deal—they cost \$1.99 each at DifferentDrummersKitchen.com (800-375-2665).



Foil cutters are one of the handiest wine accessories ever invented, and the Screwpull is one of the best and most reasonably priced at \$7.95 at lwaWine.com (800-527-4072).



Master sommelier Tim Gaiser is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

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BY KIMBERLY Y. MASIBAY



what's new

Gifts for Cooks

Whether you're hunting for a stocking stuffer or working on your own wish list, here are a few good ideas to get you started.



Knife art

You might be tempted to save these handcrafted knives for special occasions, but they're built to hold up to the rigors of everyday use. The blades are forged of high-carbon Swedish stainless steel, the comfortable hardwood handles are impregnated with resins for durability, and the knives have a lifetime guarantee. The two-piece set comes with a sturdy leather sheath and costs \$139 at NewWestKnifeWorks.com.

Have a ball

Shouldn't ice cream be as fun to make as it is to eat? With the Play & Freeze ice-cream maker from Industrial Revolution, it can be. Just fill one end of the ball with ice and salt, the other end with ice-cream base (use your favorite recipe), and then play with the ball for about 15 minutes.

Next thing you know, you'll have a pint or a quart of soft, creamy ice cream. The balls come in a variety of colors; the pint-size version sells for \$29.95 and the quart-size model for \$39 at Rei.com.



A star is born

These heavy-duty, cast-aluminum cake pans from Kaiser let you bake the prettiest star-shaped cakes, and thanks to the non-stick coating, cakes release neatly and cleanup is a breeze. The large pan sells for about \$25 and the small pan for about \$14 at Amazon.com.



And everything nice

Whether you want just a sprinkle of nutmeg for your eggnog or a teaspoon of cinnamon for your gingerbread, these cute little spice mills make it easy to grind your own. Peugeot's new Amboine nutmeg mill sells for \$58 at CookSite.com, and Kuhn Rikon's Vase Grinder sells for \$29.95 at PleasantHillGrain.com (fill it with cinnamon bark chips, available for \$2.95 for 2 oz. at BakersCatalogue.com).

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tool vs. tool

Pasta Machines

If you want to make fresh pasta for the lasagne on p. 67 of this issue, you'll need a pasta machine. But, what kind? The classic choice would be a hand-cranked machine, but these days, you have another option: a pasta roller set that attaches to a KitchenAid stand mixer. To find out which

alternative is best, I tried out the KitchenAid attachments and four of the most common hand-cranked machines on the market (Marcato Atlas, VillaWare Imperia, VillaWare Al Dente, and Belpasta Trattorina), and here's what I discovered.

—Laura Giannatempo,
assistant editor



The KitchenAid pasta roller/cutter set sells for \$119.99 at CooksWares.com.

KitchenAid pasta roller set

The best thing about using these attachments is that the stand mixer does most of the work. There's no handle to crank, so both your hands are free—you feed the dough sheets into the rollers with one hand and catch them with the other. You can decide how fast you want to roll the dough by simply changing the motor speed.

The set includes a pasta roller attachment for rolling the dough into exceptionally thin, silky pasta sheets and two cutter attachments: one for making fettuccine, the other for linguine. All the attachments are sturdy and a breeze to set up.

Bottom line: If you have a KitchenAid stand mixer, don't think twice; get the pasta roller set. It's so easy to use, even a novice pasta maker will feel like a pro.



The Marcato Atlas 150 sells for \$49.99 at Fantes.com. (The optional motor is \$99.95 at CutleryAndMore.com.)

Hand-cranked pasta machines

Most of the hand-cranked machines I tried work just fine. Although turning the crank isn't hard, it is a bit awkward. You have to use one hand to power the machine while you feed the dough into the rollers and catch it on the other side with your other hand. This becomes even trickier as the pasta sheet grows longer and thinner because you have to stop turning the crank and stretch out the pasta as it comes out of the rollers. To address this challenge, some manufacturers offer an optional motor you can attach in place of the handle. Though they did free up my hands, the motors I tried were complicated to install and caused the machines to wobble, so I wasn't crazy about them.

Of the hand-cranked machines I tried, my favorite is the Marcato Atlas 150. It's a solid machine that rolls out smooth, very thin pasta and has an easy-to-use dial to change roller settings.

What about ravioli attachments?

Most brands, including KitchenAid, sell ravioli attachments, but I found them clumsy to use, and the results were disappointing. Sure, the ravioli came out all the same size, but they were tiny and skimpy on the filling, and sometimes the filling wasn't evenly distributed. I prefer hand-made ravioli, with all their charming irregularities.



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Boysenberry Blueberry Pie



1 jar **DICKINSON'S®** Pure Seedless Boysenberry Preserves
2 9" Pie Crusts
1/3 c. Flour
4 c. Fresh Blueberries
Optional: Vanilla Bean Ice Cream

Heat oven to 400°F. Combine flour with berries; fold in preserves. Place one crust in a 9" pie pan and pour mixture into crust. Cover with second crust, seal and crimp edge. Cut slits in the top of crust and bake for 45 minutes. Cool slightly before serving. Serve optional with vanilla bean ice cream. Makes 8 servings.



Angel Cake Supreme



1 jar **DICKINSON'S®** Pure Seedless Cascade Mountain™ Red Raspberry Preserves
1 jar **DICKINSON'S®** Lemon Curd
2 Tbsp. Water
1 10"-round Angel Food Cake
1 8-oz. container Whipped Topping
3/4 c. Powdered Sugar
Optional: Raspberries, fresh or frozen

In a small bowl, mix preserves and water; set aside. Split cake in half, horizontally. Spread curd on bottom half; replace top. Blend 1/2 of preserves mixture with whipped topping and powdered sugar; frost cake. Drizzle remaining preserves over top of cake. Garnish with optional raspberries. Makes 12 servings.



Blackberry Cheesecake Shakes



1 jar **DICKINSON'S®** Pure Seedless Marion Blackberry Preserves
3 c. Vanilla Bean Ice Cream
4 oz. Cream Cheese
1/2 tsp. Almond Extract
3/4 c. Milk
Optional: Whipped Cream

Combine all ingredients in a blender and process until smooth. Serve in 6 chilled glasses. Garnish with optional whipped cream. Makes 6 servings. NOTE: The preserves and cream cheese mixture makes this shake an extraordinary gourmet dessert!



Lemon Poppy Seed Fruit Salad



1 jar **DICKINSON'S®** Lemon Curd
1/2 c. Orange Juice
1/4 c. Oil
1 Tbsp. Poppy Seeds
Lettuce Leaves
6 c. Assorted Fruit such as orange segments, melon balls and various berries
Optional: 1 tsp. Orange Peel, grated

In a blender, combine curd and juice. Cover and blend. Gradually add oil, processing until smooth. Stir in poppy seeds. Arrange fruit on lettuce leaves on a large platter. Spoon dressing over fruit just before serving. Makes 6 servings. NOTE: Lime lovers, try substituting **Dickinson's** Lime Curd.



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From left: The Oxo screen with a folding handle costs \$19.99 at Oxo.com, Cuisipro's splatter screen is \$18.95 at ChefTools.com, Tovolo's silicone screen with a detachable handle costs \$19.99, and the Deluxe set costs \$14.99 (the smaller of the two screens is shown) at BedBathAndBeyond.com.

worth owning

A screen no cook should be without

Splatter screens may not be sexy, but as far as we're concerned, they're indispensable. We were painfully reminded of that fact when we first tested one of Jennifer McLagan's wonderful braised chicken recipes on p. 56. The recipe involved browning chicken thighs in a skillet on the stove, and we neglected to top our pan with a splatter screen. Needless to say, we promptly got popped in the eye by a splatter of hot grease. So whether you're browning chicken, cooking your Sunday bacon, or frying soft-shell crabs, put a screen on that pan. It'll keep your stove from becoming a greasy mess and prevent you from getting a nasty burn.

test drive

Gardening in the kitchen

At this time of year, the thought of snipping fresh herbs from the garden is a distant memory for many of us. And for me, the thought of growing my own herbs in little pots on my windowsill is more a pipe dream than anything else—many a time I've tried and many a time I've failed. So, when I saw an Aerogarden filled with thriving fragrant basil at a housewares store near my home, I was more than a little intrigued.

I went home and read about the contraption at the company's Web site, Aerogrow.com, and I have to say, the garden sounded pretty amazing: It lets you grow herbs, lettuce, vegetables, or flowers on your countertop. The plants grow aeroponically, meaning the roots are suspended in air and water, so there's no dirt. A harvest can be ready in as lit-

tle as 28 days. And, best of all, supposedly no green thumb is required—Aerogrow guarantees 100% success. How could I resist?

I brought home an Aerogarden with a basil seed kit and setup (easy). Talk about instant gratification: By the next evening, the seeds had sprouted. After that, growth was remarkably swift. The built-in grow lights cycled on and off automatically, and a reminder system told me to add water or nutrients to the reservoir. In about a month, I had basil galore, and the harvest continued for a couple months more.

No question about it, the Aerogarden lived up to the hype. Impressed as I am with it, I do have one reservation: The Aerogarden isn't cheap, so unless you're ready to commit to



This lettuce-filled Aerogarden has been growing for 23 days.

using it for the long term, you might want to think twice before making the investment. I say that because, even though I very much enjoyed growing my own basil, as the weeks passed, I found myself starting to resent the Aerogarden's presence on my countertop, but that's

because I have precious little counterspace in my Manhattan kitchen. If I were lucky enough to have more space, I'd welcome an Aerogarden into my kitchen for good.

The Aerogarden sells for \$149.95 at Aerogrow.com.

Winner:

Best overall Santoku,
Wall Street Journal
Catalog Critic (7/1/05)



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review

Enameled cast-iron Dutch ovens

BY MOLLY STEVENS

Whether you have meaty beef short ribs braising in the oven or a piquant pork posole bubbling away on top of the stove, success depends on having the right pot. You need one that can maintain a gentle, even heat during a long, quiet simmer. And from my experience, the pots that do this best are cast-iron Dutch ovens (also known as cocottes, casseroles, and French ovens). Cast iron, in addition to being last-a-lifetime durable, conducts heat very slowly; it takes a long time to heat up, but once hot, it holds that heat admirably well. And cast iron can go right from the stovetop to the oven, an essential step in many braises. Best of all, cast iron that's been coated with smooth glossy enamel makes a great braising vessel that's also nonreactive and easy to clean.

If you own one of these enameled cast-iron pots or even if you've just eyed them longingly at the store, you probably

know they're expensive. But they're well worth the investment, as these sturdy pots are made to last and a joy to own.

For a long time, there were few choices when shopping for an enameled cast-iron Dutch oven, but recently a number of brands have entered the market. Curious to compare the various options, we put six of the most widely available to the test.

In the end, we concluded that all the pots we tested are good choices—cast iron by nature is a reliable and predictable mate-

rial, and since all the pots were constructed of similar weight cast iron, they all performed admirably in our tests. They all seared and simmered well, held heat, sautéed evenly, and turned out beautiful stews and braises. As noted in the individual listings at right, the differences among the pots showed up in subtle ways: the design of a handle, the fit of a lid, the shape of a pot.

How we tested

We focused on 5- to 6-qt. cast-iron Dutch ovens, which we consider the most useful size. In each, we boiled and simmered with the lid on and off, seared skin-on chicken and made a stovetop chicken stew, caramelized onions, seared beef, oven-braised pot roast, and reduced sauces. We also hefted the pots into and out of the oven, weighed them, and took their measurements.



Best-fitting lid

Staub Cocotte
5 quart, \$189.95
ChefsResource.com

The richly colored high-gloss enamel, elegant design, and finial-like top handle makes this pot the most stylish of the bunch. The uniquely designed lid fits snugly and retains more moisture than other models, both on the stovetop and in the oven. The wide side handles are easy to grip with oven mitts, but the sloped sides and narrower base mean less room for searing.

Our favorite

Lodge Enamel
5 quart, \$167.95
Lodge.com

It was love at first sight with this well-designed pot. Its broad base allows maximum room for searing. The graceful loop handle feels great in hand and stays cool on the stovetop. Plus, this pot is so handsome you may want to leave it on display in your kitchen. Our only word of caution: The thick cast-iron construction makes it heavy for its size.

For big batches

Mario Batali Italian Essentials Pot
6 quart, \$99.95
SurLaTable.com

The broad base, straight sides, and bigger capacity of this pot translate into maximum room for searing, so you can brown meat in fewer batches. Its width easily accommodates unwieldy cuts, such as lamb shanks. We did notice significant evaporation during braising due to the wider base and a looser lid. While the thick-walled construction and large capacity make this the heaviest pot in the line up, it's also one of the best values.

Most affordable

Innova Round Oven
5 quart, \$49.99
Target.com

This unassuming pot held its own against the sleeker and better-known brands. Its extremely low price tag and shorter warranty period (25 years) do make us wonder, but the parameters of our testing don't allow us to measure longevity. The base is also narrower than any of the rest, which translates into more batches and more time spent searing.

Great find

World Cuisine Chasseur
5½ quart, \$165
Pans.com

These handsome, sturdy pots are fairly new here, but the company that makes them enjoys a 70-year reputation in France for well-designed, durable products. The wide shape is ample for searing, and the top knob stays cool on the stovetop. This pot's large capacity and heavy construction make it one of the heftier ones we tried. We were surprised by its short warranty period (10 years), given that the pot feels and looks very solid.

Easiest to maneuver

Le Creuset
5½ quart, \$194.95
KitchenEtc.com

For years, Le Creuset was the only choice for serious cooks, and time has proven these to be reliable and indestructible pots. The most noticeable advantage over the others is its slightly thinner construction, which makes it lighter and less arduous to lift. We also appreciate the wide base (ample room for searing) and the handle that stays cool on the stovetop.

What shape is best?

The most versatile Dutch ovens are round and wide with sides more straight than sloped.

These give you the largest area for searing or browning, a critical first step in many braises and stews. Dutch ovens should also be at least 4 inches deep to accommodate pot roasts and other large braising cuts.

Oval pots are appealing, but when sautéing or searing on the stovetop, the ends of the oval tend to cook unevenly. The oval shape, however, is ideal for elongated pot roasts and whole poultry.

Spikes for basting

The undersides of the lids of many Dutch ovens are festooned with spikes (or raised dots) designed to form droplets of condensation from steam rising off the simmering liquid. These droplets theoretically drip down onto the food, basting it as it braises. In our tests, we found that condensation formed on the underside of all lids—spiked or flat—and dripped back into the pot. There was no significant difference in the amount of moisture or the appearance of foods braised under the two types of lids.

Contributing editor Molly Stevens is the author of the award-winning cookbook All About Braising. ♦



Winning tip

Freeze egg whites in ice-cube trays

When a recipe calls for egg yolks, I freeze the remaining egg whites in an ice-cube tray, taking care to put one egg white in each ice-cube section. This way I know that when I need, say, three egg whites, all I have to do is push out three cubes. I let them come to room temperature and use them according to the recipe.

—Helen Ploderer-King,
Châteauneuf-du-Pape, France

A prize for the best tip

We want your best tips—we'll pay for the ones we publish—and we'll give a prize to the cleverest tip in each issue. Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506 or email fc tips@taunton.com.

Rehydrate dried mushrooms with wine

Instead of using hot water to rehydrate dried mushrooms, I use warmed wine, either white or red. The wine adds richness and depth to a number of dishes, many of which might already include wine. This method is also great for rehydrating dried cherries and cranberries.

—John Delzani,
Rocky River, Ohio

Dishwasher cycle cuts rising time for yeast dough

When I need yeast dough for bread or pizza to rise quickly, I put it in the (clean and empty) dishwasher and turn on the drying cycle only. This cuts the rising time quite a bit.

—Jennifer Page, via email

Oil your board to mince red pepper flakes

When I want to keep a small amount of red pepper flakes from jumping and flying while mincing them with a chef's knife, I apply a light coat of oil to the surface of my board. This keeps the flakes from straying too far.

—Mary Ann Schellati,
Yonkers, New York



A paper coffee filter serves as an herb sachet

When making stocks or soups, many recipes call for an herb sachet, traditionally made with cheesecloth. But I never seem to have cheesecloth around when I need it, so I use a paper coffee filter instead. I put the herbs and aromatics inside the coffee filter, tie the top with twine, and add it to the liquid at the required time.

—Gary Krause, via email

(continued on p. 38)



The prize for this issue's winner: A Wüsthof classic four-piece set of hollow-ground steak knives with sharpener; value about \$200.

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Boil potatoes and steam vegetables at the same time

When I boil potatoes, I steam fresh vegetables in a steamer insert placed over the pot. I save energy and free up a burner on my cooktop.

—Vee Robillard, via email

Keep your instant-read thermometers handy

Whenever I needed a meat thermometer, I used to have to fish around in my utensil drawer to find one. Now, I keep all my instant-read thermometers handy and organized in the hole of my spool of kitchen twine. Not only are they quickly accessible, but I can also make efficient use of the space the roll takes up.

—Noelle Bohnenkamp,
Broomfield, Colorado

Soften butter in minutes

I often forget to bring butter to room temperature ahead of time when a recipe calls for softened butter. To do it quickly, I fill a water glass with very hot tap water and let it sit for a few seconds to warm up. I empty the glass and turn it upside down over the amount of butter I need. The butter softens in less than a minute without melting (as it would if I microwaved it for a few seconds).

—Catherine Emery, via email

A potato ricer juices pomegranates

When I had guests over for the holidays, we discovered an ingenious way to juice pomegranates: We used a potato ricer. The juice came right out, leaving the pith and seeds behind.

—Nikki Gravelle, Merville,
British Columbia

A chilled rolling pin keeps pie dough cold

I put my rolling pin in the freezer for about 20 minutes before rolling pie crust. It helps the dough stay cold while I'm rolling. This is especially useful if your kitchen gets very warm.

—Kathy Deering, Burns Lake,
British Columbia

STAFF CORNER

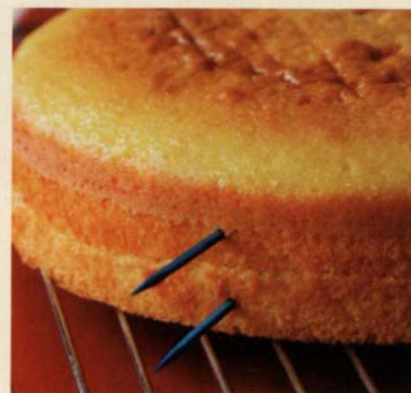
Serve meat on a warm platter

I like to serve my Thanksgiving turkey and holiday roasts on a warm platter because it helps the meat stay warm longer. So, while the cooked bird or roast is resting, I turn off the heat and put the serving platter in the oven for a few minutes; the residual heat does the job. Just remember to use a potholder when handling the platter.

—Kimberly Y. Masibay,
senior editor

TOO GOOD TO FORGET

from *Fine Cooking* #7



Aligning cake layers

When making a layer cake, I cut a single cake into two layers and spread filling in between them before icing the entire cake. Here's a simple method for re-aligning the cut layers so the cake ends up level. Before I cut, I insert one toothpick horizontally into the side of the cake near the top and insert another one near the bottom, directly underneath the first one. I cut the cake, spread the filling on the first layer, then set the top back, realigning the toothpicks. This method ensures a level cake but doesn't require a perfectly level cut.

—Betsy Schwartz,
Greenwich, Connecticut ♦

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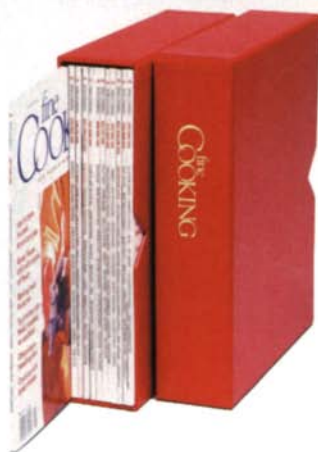
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A Juicy Prime Rib



A few special touches turn this classic into a sophisticated dinner

BY SUZANNE GOIN



Despite what most people think, I usually play only a supporting role in my family's kitchen during the holidays. Ever since my restaurant career began some 20 years ago, my mother has made a point of not putting me to work at the stove. She takes care of the big items—the turkey or the roast—and lets me fiddle with the stuffing or the vegetables. For these dishes, I avoid overly complicated, “chefy” preparations. I prefer to stick with classic dishes and keep things simple. But I

always like to add a little something—a fancy garnish or an unusual ingredient—to mark the specialness of the occasion.

This holiday menu, which combines family favorites with a few beloved menu items from my restaurants, is in tune with this spirit. While all the dishes are straightforward at heart, a few twists make them feel elegant and unusual. Take the soup: It's a simple purée of white beans—nothing too fussy. But top it with some earthy sautéed wild mushrooms and a dollop of

herbed mascarpone cheese, and it becomes a refined first course. A smooth, silky texture also sets it apart from your average bean soup. The trick to getting that texture is to purée the beans and vegetables with only a small amount of the cooking liquid first, and then to slowly pour in more liquid until you get a nice, creamy consistency.

We've always been a roast-beef-at-Christmas kind of family, so I decided to play a bit with this tradition for the main course. I bury a three-bone prime-rib

for the Holidays



roast under a big pile of smashed garlic, butter, and fresh herbs, and then I slow-cook it in a low oven for at least two hours. The results are luxurious. The meat becomes meltingly tender, and the herbs and garlic infuse it right to the core.

For a twist on classic mashed potatoes, I borrowed a technique we use at my restaurant AOC, where I boil tiny fingerling potatoes, crush them slightly, enrich them with butter, and top them with crème fraîche. Here, I add a little horseradish—an obvious winner with

the beef—to the crème fraîche. To play counterpoint to the richness of both prime rib and potatoes, I toss roasted carrots and shallots with oil-cured olives and a vibrant gremolata of garlic, lemon zest, and parsley.

As a chef, I'm used to breaking recipes down into steps so that they can be mostly made ahead. For this menu, I've done that for you with the timeline on p. 42. If you follow it, you'll have plenty of time to do all the cooking and still enjoy some quality time with your guests.

Menu

Serves six



White Bean
Soup with Wild
Mushrooms &
Chive Mascarpone



Arugula, Mint
& Apple Salad
with Walnuts
& Buttermilk
Dressing



Slow-Roasted
Prime Rib

Smashed Potatoes
with Horseradish
Crème Fraîche

Roasted Carrots
& Shallots with
Oil-Cured Olives
& Gremolata



Chocolate
Caramel Tart with
Macadamia Nuts
& Crème Fraîche
Whipped Cream

Timeline

This menu isn't difficult, but it does have a lot of steps. The key to making it do-able and stress-free is to plan ahead, do your shopping early, and organize yourself. Here's a strategy for making it happen.

Make it fun for yourself. When I cook at home, I have a ritual that involves picking what music I listen to and what I drink while I cook—this ranges from green tea to champagne or wine.

A week ahead:

Make, roll out, and freeze the tart crust

The day before:

Make the soup

Clean and dry the mushrooms

Make the chive mascarpone

Clean and prep the carrots

Slice the shallots for the carrots

Slice the olives

Make the horseradish cream

Make the buttermilk dressing

Defrost the tart crust in the fridge

In the morning:

Wash and spin-dry the salad greens

Toast the walnuts

Make the gremolata

Boil the potatoes

Cut the herbs for all the recipes

Make the tart

Take the beef out of the fridge to come to room temperature

In the afternoon:

Sauté the mushrooms

Prepare the butter for the beef

Smash the garlic for the beef

Heat the oven

Sear and roast the beef
(about 2 hours 45 minutes before you want to serve it)

Just before dinner:

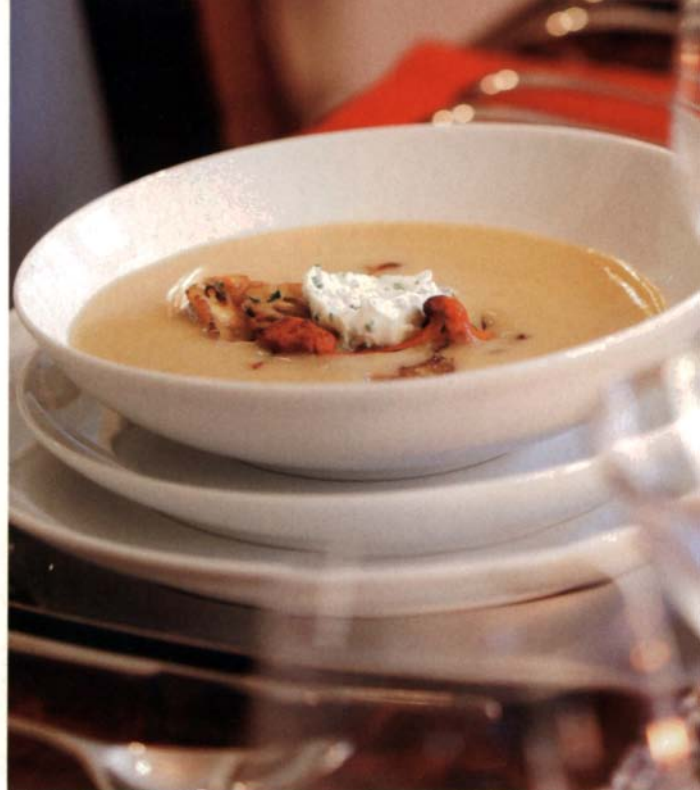
Slice the apples and assemble the salad (don't dress it until you're ready to serve it)

Reheat the soup and the mushrooms

Open the wine

Roast the carrots and finish the potatoes while the roast is resting

Make the whipped cream just before serving the tart



White Bean Soup with Wild Mushrooms & Chive Mascarpone

Serves six to eight; yields 8 cups.

1 Tbs. fennel seeds
½ cup plus 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 small sprig rosemary (leaves only)
1 chile d'árbol (or other small, hot dried chile), stemmed and crumbled
1 cup chopped yellow onion
½ cup chopped fennel
1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves
2 cups dried cannellini beans, picked through and rinsed
Kosher salt
½ cup mascarpone cheese
1 Tbs. minced shallots
1 Tbs. minced chives
Freshly ground black pepper
1 Tbs. unsalted butter
½ lb. wild mushrooms, stems trimmed, caps thinly sliced (such as shiitake, oyster mushrooms, or chanterelles)
1 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Make the soup: Toast the fennel seeds in a small skillet over medium heat until they release their aroma and are golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Pound them coarsely in a mortar or grind them coarsely in a spice grinder.

Heat a 6- to 8-qt. heavy-bottomed pot over high heat for 2 minutes. Pour in ½ cup olive oil

Download a printable shopping list and timeline at finecooking.com

and add the rosemary leaves and chile. Let them sizzle in the oil for about 1 minute. Add the onion, fennel, fennel seeds, and 1 Tbs. thyme and cook until the onion is softened, 3 to 4 minutes.

Add the beans to the pot and cook a few more minutes, stirring to coat well. Add 3 quarts of water, and bring to a boil over high heat. Turn the heat to low and place a circle of parchment over the beans to keep them underwater. Simmer, stirring occasionally. After 30 minutes, add 1½ Tbs. salt to the beans, and continue cooking at a low simmer until the beans are tender, 1 to 1½ hours.

While the soup is cooking, stir together the mascarpone, minced shallots, and chives in a small bowl. Season to taste with salt and pepper, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate.

Separate the bean mixture from the liquid by straining the soup over a bowl. Put half the bean mixture into a blender with ½ cup of the liquid (you will need to purée the soup in batches). Process on the lowest speed until the mixture is puréed. With the blender running at medium speed, slowly pour in more of the liquid, until the soup is the consistency of heavy cream. Turn the speed up to high, and blend until completely smooth, about 1 minute. Set aside, and repeat with the second batch. (Save any extra liquid for thinning the soup later, if necessary.) Taste and adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper. Keep the soup warm in a pot on the stove. If making ahead, cool completely before refrigerating.

Sauté the mushrooms: Turn on the exhaust fan. Heat a 12-inch skillet over high heat for 1 minute. Swirl in the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil and the butter. When the butter melts, scatter the mushrooms into the pan. Season with ¼ tsp. salt and a pinch of pepper. Cook the mushrooms, stirring occasionally, until they are tender, browned, and a little crispy, about 5 minutes. Stir in the parsley and the remaining 1 tsp. thyme and remove from the heat.

Ladle a cup of hot soup into each warm bowl. Scatter warm mushrooms over the top and add a dollop of the mascarpone.



Arugula, Mint & Apple Salad with Walnuts & Buttermilk Dressing

Serves six.

The dressing may be made a day ahead.

FOR THE DRESSING:

2 Tbs. finely diced shallots
(about 1 medium)
1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
½ tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
¼ cup crème fraîche
¼ cup buttermilk
½ cup mayonnaise
Freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE SALAD:

¾ cup walnuts (about 3 oz.)
1 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt
2 apples (preferably Gala, Fuji, or Pink Lady)
½ lb. baby arugula, washed and spun dry
1 medium head radicchio (about 4 oz.), washed, spun dry, and torn into bite-size pieces
1 cup small fresh mint leaves (or large leaves torn into small pieces), washed and spun dry

Make the dressing: Combine the shallots, lemon juice, and ½ tsp. salt in a small bowl, and let sit 5 minutes. Whisk in the

crème fraîche and buttermilk, then the mayonnaise. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper to taste.

Assemble the salad: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F.

Spread the walnuts on a baking sheet and toast them, stirring once or twice, until they smell nutty and are lightly browned, 8 to 10 minutes. When the nuts have cooled slightly, toss them with the olive oil and a generous pinch of salt. Crumble half of them with your hands.

Cut the apples into ⅛-inch slices and put them in a large salad bowl. Dress the apples with half of the buttermilk dressing and then very gently toss in the arugula, radicchio, and mint. The salad should be lightly dressed—add more salad dressing only if needed (you will have leftover dressing, which will keep for a few days in the fridge).

Arrange the salad on six plates and scatter the toasted walnuts (both crumbled and whole) over the top.

This bright, tangy salad is a refreshing break between the rich bean soup and the luxurious prime rib.

Slow-Roasted Prime Rib

Serves six to eight.

For a delicious sandwich using the leftovers, see p. 78. Fleur de sel is a premium sea salt harvested in France (see p. 84 for sources).

3-bone beef rib roast (about 6 lb.), preferably from the small or loin end and Prime grade (see p. 82 for buying information)

3 Tbs. fleur de sel or other flaky sea salt

1½ Tbs. coarsely cracked black pepper

1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

8 to 10 sprigs rosemary

8 to 10 sprigs thyme

10 medium cloves garlic, smashed and peeled

3 Tbs. unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes

Take the beef out of the refrigerator 2 hours before cooking so it can come to room temperature. After 30 minutes, season the meat on all sides with the fleur de sel and cracked black pepper.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat oven to 325°F.

Turn on the exhaust fan. Heat a 12-inch skillet over high heat for 1 minute. Swirl in the olive oil and, when the oil puts off its first wisp of smoke, place the beef in the pan, and sear it on all the outer sides (not the cut sides) until well browned, 6 to 8 minutes total. Use a set of tongs to flip the beef; be careful of splattering oil. With two sets of tongs, transfer the beef, bone side down, to a roasting rack set in a small roasting pan. Arrange the rosemary, thyme, garlic, and butter evenly on top.

Roast the beef, basting every 30 minutes with a bulb baster, until a thermometer inserted into the center reads 120° to 125°F for rare, about 2 hours. Cook to 130° to 135°F for medium-rare (about 2¼ hours), 140° to 145°F for medium (about 2½ hours). Let the meat rest at least 15 minutes before carving (see p. 82).

How to serve: Divide the meat, potatoes, and carrots among six large warmed dinner plates. Drizzle with the roasting juices, if you like.

Slow-roasting the prime rib makes it exceptionally tender and juicy.



Three tips for a perfect rib roast: bring the beef to room temperature before cooking, baste it often, and let it rest before carving.

Sear the rib roast in a skillet to give it a nice caramelized crust. Grab the bone side with a pair of tongs to help you flip it in the skillet.

Pile on garlic, fresh herb sprigs, and butter to infuse the roast with flavor. When the butter melts, it creates rich drippings for basting.





Roast it in a 325°F oven for 2 to 2½ hours, depending on the desired doneness. Internal temperature is more reliable than time, though, so use a meat thermometer.

For information on buying and carving prime rib, see *From Our Test Kitchen*, p. 76.

perfect pairings

Soup: Dry sherries, such as Palo Cortado and Amontillado, are traditional drinks to pair with soup. The **NV Palo Cortado Solera Reserva Peninsula** (\$19) or the **NV Amontillado “Los Arcos”** (\$16), both from famed producer Emilio Lustau in Jerez, Spain, would be delicious with the White Bean Soup. Serve them chilled.

Salad: The perfect accompaniment to the Arugula, Mint & Apple Salad would be a vibrant Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand; look for the **2005 Seifried Sauvignon Blanc, Nelson** (\$16) or the **2005 Matua Valley Paretai Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough** (\$19).

Prime-rib roast and side dishes: The Slow-Roasted Prime Rib calls for a truly grand red. For a special meal such as this, I'd splurge on a fine Cabernet Sauvignon, such as the **2002 Etude Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California** (\$75) or the **2002 Penfolds Bin 707 Cabernet Sauvignon, South Australia** (\$80). Both are simply fantastic and widely available. For a more affordable option, try the **2002 Château Souverain Cabernet, Alexander Valley, California** (\$20).

Tart: Finally, a fine tawny port would be just right with the rich Chocolate Caramel Tart; try the **Nieport 10 Year Tawny Port** (\$28) or the **Grahams 20 Year Tawny Port** (\$40). Both are also delicious with cheeses or sipped solo.

—Contributing editor *Tim Gaiser*
is a master sommelier.



Smashed Potatoes with Horseradish Crème Fraîche

Serves six.

- ¾ cup crème fraîche**
- 3 Tbs. prepared horseradish, more to taste**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1½ lb. small fingerling potatoes or baby potatoes, such as baby Yukons or Red Bliss**
- 4 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Combine the crème fraîche and horseradish in a small bowl. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and more horseradish, if you like.

Put the potatoes in a medium pot, cover with cold water (by about 2 inches), and add 1 Tbs. salt. Bring to a boil, turn down the heat to medium low, and simmer gently until the potatoes are tender when pierced with a skewer, 15 to 20 minutes. Reserve about ¼ cup of the water and drain the potatoes. At this point, you can hold the potatoes for a few hours (To reheat, immerse them in boiling water until they're heated through, about 5 minutes.)

Let the potatoes cool for a moment and then slightly smash them with a wooden spoon just until they crack open. Return the potatoes to the pot over medium heat. Add the butter and ¾ tsp. salt. Stir to coat the potatoes with the butter. Add a few tablespoons of the reserved potato water to help coat and glaze the potatoes. Stir in the parsley, taste, and adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper.

Top each serving with crème fraîche and a sprinkle of pepper.



Roasted Carrots & Shallots with Oil-Cured Olives & Gremolata

Serves six.

- ½ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**
- Zest of 1 medium lemon, finely chopped (1½ to 2 Tbs.)**
- 1 tsp. minced garlic**
- 2 lb. medium carrots**
- 1 cup ¼-inch-thick-sliced shallot rounds (3 or 4 medium shallots)**
- 1 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves**
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 tsp. kosher salt**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- ¼ cup pitted and thinly sliced oil-cured olives**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F.

Toss the parsley, lemon zest, and garlic in a bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and set aside. This mixture is called gremolata.

Peel the carrots and slice in half lengthwise. If they're big, slice each half lengthwise again into long quarters. Put the carrots on a large rimmed baking sheet and toss with the shallots, thyme, olive oil, salt, and several grinds of pepper. Arrange the carrots in a single layer.

Roast the carrots, tossing occasionally, until they are tender and ever so slightly browned, 20 to 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and toss in the olives and the gremolata. Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper to taste.

The sweet earthiness of the carrots pairs perfectly with the briny flavor of the olives.

tip: To prep the lemon zest for the gremolata, peel it off in long strips with a vegetable peeler, cut away any of the white pith, and chop the zest finely.



Chocolate Caramel Tart with Macadamia Nuts & Crème Fraîche Whipped Cream

Serves twelve to sixteen.

FOR THE CRUST:

- 6 oz. (1⅓ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour, plus a little more for rolling**
- 3 Tbs. granulated sugar**
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt**
- 4 oz. (8 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut into small cubes**
- 2 Tbs. heavy cream**
- 1 large egg yolk**

FOR THE FILLING:

- 1¼ cups macadamia nuts**
- 2 cups heavy cream**
- 1½ oz. (3 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into chunks**
- 1 cup plus 1½ Tbs. granulated sugar**
- ¼ cup light corn syrup**
- ½ vanilla bean, split and scraped**
- 6 oz. 70% bittersweet chocolate, chopped (about 1¼ cups)**
- ½ cup whole milk**
- ¼ cup crème fraîche**



Make the crust: In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the flour, sugar, salt and butter and mix on medium speed until the butter blends into the flour and the mixture resembles a coarse meal. Mix the cream and yolk together in a small bowl. With the mixer on low speed, gradually add the cream mixture and mix until just combined. Do not overwork the dough.

Transfer the dough to a work surface and bring it together with your hands. Shape the dough into a 1-inch-thick disk. If the dough seems too soft to roll out, put it in the refrigerator for 5 to 10 minutes to firm it up a little. Set the dough on a lightly floured work surface, sprinkle a little flour over it, and roll it out into a 1/8-inch-thick circle 14 to 15 inches in diameter, re-flouring the dough and work surface as necessary.

Starting at one side, roll and wrap the dough around the rolling pin to pick it up. Unroll the dough over an 11-inch fluted tart

pan with a removable bottom and gently fit it loosely in the pan, lifting the edges and pressing the dough into the corners with your fingers. To remove the excess dough, roll the rolling pin lightly over the top of the tart pan, cutting a nice, clean edge. Cover loosely with plastic and chill for 1 hour.

Make the tart: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F.

Prick the bottom of the crust with a fork and line it with a piece of parchment paper or several opened-out basket-style coffee filters. Fill the lined tart shell with dried beans or pie weights and bake until set around the edges, about 15 minutes. Take the tart out of the oven, and carefully lift out the paper and pie weights (if using coffee filters, spoon out most of the weights first). Return the tart to the oven and bake until the crust is golden brown all over, another 10 to 15 minutes. Cool completely on a rack.

While the crust is baking, spread the nuts on a baking sheet and toast (in the same oven) until they are golden brown and smell nutty, 10 to 12 minutes. Let them cool, and then chop coarsely.

In a small pot, bring 3/4 cup of the cream and the butter to a simmer. Set aside.

Combine 1 cup of the sugar with the corn syrup, vanilla bean seeds and pod, and 1/4 cup water in a 3- or 4-qt. heavy-based pot. Boil over high heat, stirring frequently with a wooden spoon, until the mixture becomes caramel-colored. Remove from the heat and immediately (but slowly and carefully; you don't want the hot sugar to overflow or splatter) whisk in the hot cream mixture.

Pour the caramel into the baked tart shell and pick out the vanilla bean halves with a fork or tongs. Sprinkle about two-thirds of the macadamia nuts on top of the caramel. Let cool completely in the refrigerator.

When the tart is cool, put the chocolate in a large bowl. In a small pot, bring 1/2 cup of the cream, the milk, and the remaining 1 1/2 Tbs. sugar to a boil over medium-high heat. As soon as it boils, pour it over the chocolate. Let stand for 2 minutes and then stir very gently with a whisk until smooth and thoroughly combined. Let cool at room temperature for 5 minutes and then pour the chocolate filling over the completely chilled tart, covering the nuts and caramel.

Chill in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours or until completely set. Unmold the tart, using a long thin metal spatula to release it from the pan bottom. Place it on a cutting board or a serving plate, depending on how you intend to serve it.

Just before serving, whip the remaining 3/4 cup cream and the crème fraîche to soft peaks. Slice and plate the tart in the kitchen or at the table. Top each serving with a dollop of the whipped cream and scatter the remaining macadamia nuts over and around.

Tricks for a successful tart

First, fully bake the crust.

If it's underbaked it'll be soggy. You want a crumbly, cookie-like texture.

Second, be careful with the caramel.

Turn off the heat and whisk in the hot cream cautiously, a little at a time, so it doesn't overflow all over the stove (and you).

Last, let the caramel set

completely before you pour the chocolate filling over it (let the chocolate cool slightly before pouring).

Suzanne Goin is the chef and co-owner of Lucques and AOC wine bar in Los Angeles. Her book, Sunday Suppers at Lucques, won a James Beard award. ♦

Hors d'Oeuvre *at the Ready*



Assemble and freeze them when you have time, then pull them out and cook at a moment's notice

BY KATE HAYS

As a caterer, I know that following a food preparation timeline is crucial. I always make lists of what can be prepped in advance and what needs to be done at the last minute. With that essential planning, I can easily pull off a party for 400 in a handful of days. But when entertaining at home, I'm hopeless. Dinner for six at 7 pm finds me shopping at 4. I'm not sure if being hyper-organized professionally has left me with a casual attitude about home cooking, but it seems that way. There's never enough time in a day,

and this is especially true as the holidays approach.

So that's why, around this time of year, I turn to my arsenal of make-and-freeze hors d'oeuvre. The three recipes I'm offering here pair an easy-to-use prepared dough—frozen puff pastry, phyllo dough, or wonton wrappers—with a rich and savory fill-

ing. You can assemble and cook them right away, but the great thing is that you can freeze them uncooked for future use; just pull them out and cook them before your guests arrive. With these little appetizers waiting in your freezer, you can avoid any last-minute scrambling and impress your company at the same time.



Bacon, Leek & Cheddar Mini Quiches

Yields about 4 dozen mini quiches.

You'll need mini muffin tins for this recipe; for sources, see *Where to Buy It* on p. 84.

¾ lb. bacon, cut into medium dice
3 cups medium-diced leeks, washed and drained (about 3 leeks, white and light green parts only)
1¼ cups half-and-half
1 cup grated extra-sharp Cheddar (4 oz.)
2 large eggs
2 large egg yolks
2 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme leaves
1 tsp. kosher salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
¼ tsp. ground nutmeg
Cooking spray
2 1.1-lb. packages frozen puff pastry sheets, thawed according to package directions (preferably Pepperidge Farm brand)
Flour as needed for rolling out the dough

In a medium skillet over medium-high heat, cook the bacon until browned and crispy, 6 to 8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a plate lined with a paper towel. Pour off all but 1 to 2 Tbs. of fat in the skillet. Set the skillet over medium heat and cook the leeks, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Let cool slightly.

While the leeks cool, combine the half-and-half, Cheddar, eggs, egg yolks, thyme, salt, pepper, and nutmeg in a medium bowl. Add the cooled leeks and the bacon and stir to combine.

Assemble the mini quiches:

Lightly spray four mini muffin tins (or two if your tins have two dozen cups) with cooking spray. (If you don't have enough muffin tins, you can assemble the quiches in batches, storing the remaining egg mixture and dough in the refrigerator until you're ready to use it.)

Working with one sheet of puff pastry dough at a time, use a floured rolling pin to roll the dough on a lightly floured work surface into a 10- by 18-inch rectangle. Stamp out 3-inch circles of

dough with a cookie cutter and gently press the rounds into the mini muffin tins, making sure that each round is centered and that the dough extends up to the top of the tin. Fill each with about 1 Tbs. of filling—you can fill right to the top of the dough. Repeat with the remaining dough and filling until all the filling is used. You may not need all the dough; save leftovers for another use. You can bake the quiches immediately or freeze and bake them later; see the instructions below.

TO FREEZE:

Freeze the unbaked quiches in the muffin tins for about 2 hours, or until set. Remove them from the tins and transfer them to an airtight container, setting parchment or plastic wrap between layers, or seal them in a plastic bag. Store in the freezer, where they'll keep for about a month.

TO BAKE:

If frozen, do not thaw the quiches before baking. Put the quiches back into the muffin tins. Heat the oven to 400°F and position racks in the top and bottom thirds of the oven. Bake the quiches, switching the position of the tins halfway through baking, until the filling is puffed and the crust is golden brown, about 20 minutes if fresh or 30 to 35 minutes if frozen.



Frozen puff pastry makes it easy to turn out little quiches your guests will love.



Pork Shiu Mai

Yields about 5 dozen shiu mai.

1 lb. ground pork
1 cup thinly sliced napa cabbage, plus extra leaves for lining the steamer
½ cup chopped scallions (both white and green parts)
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
1½ Tbs. soy sauce
1 Tbs. finely chopped garlic
1 Tbs. rice vinegar
1 Tbs. cornstarch; more for dusting
2 tsp. finely chopped fresh ginger
1½ tsp. Asian sesame oil
1 tsp. granulated sugar
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 large egg white
55 to 60 shiu mai wrappers or wonton wrappers
Soy dipping sauce (recipe at right)

In a large bowl, stir together the pork, sliced cabbage, scallions, cilantro, soy sauce, garlic, rice vinegar, 1 Tbs. cornstarch, ginger, sesame oil, sugar, pepper, and egg white.

Assemble the shiu mai: Sprinkle a rimmed baking sheet liberally with cornstarch. Set a small bowl of water on the work surface. If the wrappers are larger than 3 inches across in any direction, trim them with a cookie cutter to 3-inch rounds. Otherwise, leave as squares or rectangles.

Working with one wrapper at a time, and keeping the remaining wrappers covered with plastic wrap so they don't dry out, place a heaping teaspoon of the pork filling in the center of the wrapper. Using a pastry brush or your fingers, dab a bit of water around the edge of the wrapper to moisten. Crimp the wrapper up and around the filling, squeezing slightly with your fingers to

bring the wrapper together like a beggar's pouch. Place on the cornstarch-coated baking sheet, cover with plastic wrap, and repeat with the remaining wrappers and filling until you run out of one or the other. You can steam the shiu mai immediately or freeze and steam them later; see the instructions below.

TO FREEZE:

Freeze the uncooked shiu mai on the baking sheet. When frozen, transfer them to an airtight container, setting parchment or plastic wrap between layers, or seal them in a plastic bag. Store in the freezer, where they'll keep for about a month.

TO STEAM:

If frozen, do not thaw the shiu mai before cooking. Set up a steamer with 2 inches of water in the bottom. Line the basket with cabbage leaves to keep the shiu mai from sticking. Set over medium-high heat and cover. When steam begins to escape from the steamer, remove from the heat and carefully take off the lid. Arrange the shiu mai in the steamer so that they don't touch, as they will stick together (you'll have to cook them in batches). Cover the steamer and return to medium-high heat. Steam until the pork is cooked through (cut into one to check), 5 to 7 minutes if fresh, 10 to 12 minutes if frozen. Serve with the Soy Dipping Sauce.



Shiu mai wrappers are available in Asian markets, or else use wonton wrappers, which can be found in most supermarkets.

VARIATION:

SHRIMP & SCALLOP SHIU MAI

Instead of the ground pork, you can use ½ lb. peeled and deveined shrimp and ½ lb. dry-packed, fresh sea scallops (with the tough muscle removed). Pulse the shrimp and scallops in a food processor until almost smooth, about 12 pulses. Use this mixture instead of the ground pork in the shiu mai recipe at left.

Soy Dipping Sauce

Yields about 1 cup.

If you're not making all of the shiu mai, you won't need the full recipe; you can make a half-batch or use leftover sauce in stir-fries. Mirin, a sweet Japanese rice wine, is available in Asian grocery stores and some supermarkets.

⅓ cup soy sauce
⅓ cup rice vinegar
⅓ cup thinly sliced scallions (about 3, both white and green parts)
2 Tbs. mirin
1 Tbs. Asian sesame oil
1 tsp. finely chopped fresh ginger

Combine the soy sauce, vinegar, scallions, mirin, sesame oil, and ginger in a small bowl. Use within a day of making.

Spinach, Feta & Sun-Dried Tomato Phyllo Triangles

Yields about 6 dozen phyllo triangles.

2 10-oz. packages frozen, chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
2 cups crumbled feta cheese (about 12 oz.)
¾ cup roughly chopped fresh mint
½ cup roughly chopped sun-dried tomatoes (oil-packed and drained)
½ cup pitted and roughly chopped Kalamata olives
4 large eggs, lightly beaten
3 Tbs. chopped garlic
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
1 Tbs. finely grated lemon zest
¾ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
½ tsp. kosher salt
1 1-lb. package phyllo dough (preferably a twin-pack), thawed according to package directions
½ lb. (1 cup) melted unsalted butter, plus more as needed for baking

In a large bowl, combine the spinach, feta, mint, sun-dried tomatoes, olives, eggs, garlic, lemon juice and zest, pepper, and salt. Mix well.

Assemble the triangles: Unroll the phyllo and lay it flat on a clean, dry surface. Cover completely with plastic wrap. Working with one sheet of phyllo at a time, and keeping the rest covered with the plastic wrap to keep it from drying out, place a sheet vertically in front of you. Brush the phyllo with butter and cover with another sheet. Butter the top sheet and cut the phyllo lengthwise into equal 3-inch-wide strips. Spoon 2 tsp. of filling on the lower end of each strip as shown in the left photo below. Fold up the phyllo

strips as you would a flag to create a neat triangle, being careful not to roll too tightly or the triangles will crack when baked.

Transfer to a baking sheet and cover with plastic. Repeat with the rest of the phyllo and filling until you run out of filling. You can bake the triangles immediately or freeze and bake them later; see the instructions below.

TO FREEZE:

Freeze the uncooked triangles on the baking sheet. When frozen, transfer them to an airtight container, setting parchment or plastic wrap between layers if needed. Store in the freezer, where they'll keep for about a month.

TO BAKE:

If frozen, do not thaw the triangles before baking. Position racks in the top and bottom thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Butter two sheet pans. Arrange the phyllo triangles on the prepared baking sheets in a single layer. Brush the tops of the triangles with butter and bake until golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes for fresh triangles, 20 to 25 minutes for frozen, switching the positions of the pans halfway through baking.



[Videos](#) For tips on working with phyllo and frozen puff pastry, visit finecooking.com

Fold the phyllo around the filling to create a triangular turnover



Starting with 2 tsp. of filling at the end of a strip of phyllo, lift a corner up and over the filling to form a triangle.



Lift a corner of the triangle and roll it over, wrapping the filling in another layer of phyllo.



Continue lifting a corner of the triangle and rolling it over until you get to the end of the strip.

Kate Hays is the chef-owner of Dish Catering, based in Shelburne, Vermont. ♦

Green Beans

From casual to fancy, versatile green beans are always right for the holidays

BY RIS LACOSTE

I love green beans for many reasons, but I think it's their versatility that I appreciate the most. There are so many different ways to prepare them, it's nearly impossible to get bored. You can boil, sauté, braise, or roast, and depending on the cooking method you choose, you can highlight different delicious qualities of the beans, be it their crisp freshness or their nutty richness. And green beans only get better when they've had a chance to mingle with other flavors—so the seasoning possibilities are practically endless (for some good ideas, see the sidebar on the facing page).

Easy to cook, easy to prep

If all that weren't enough, here's another reason to love green beans: They're an incredibly cooperative ingredient. Prepping them for cooking is as hassle free as it gets—no peeling, coring, dicing, or mincing required. Just give them a good rinse; then snap or slice off the stem ends. Trimming the tails is certainly an option, but I like the natural look of green beans with their tails on.

Boil, sauté, braise, or roast

The side-dish recipes that follow give you a chance to sample several cooking techniques. For a taste of green beans' tender, nutty side, try braising them with tomatoes, onions, and spices. To experience beans at their freshest, try the quick boiled Green Beans with Mustard-Tarragon Vinaigrette. If you're looking for a festive and flavorful dish to serve on a special occasion, I recommend the sautéed beans with cranberries, walnuts, sweet potato, and sage butter—it's worth the effort. And finally, there's an easy roasted recipe with garlic and toasted pine nuts, the perfect thing to pop in the oven for a weeknight supper.



on the Side



Sautéed
green beans lend themselves to layers of flavor. Boiling the beans before I sauté them gives me the bright color and crisp texture I want.

Flavors that love green beans

You can add pizzazz to green beans with an ingredient (or a few) from this list.

AROMATIC, PUNGENT &

TANGY: anchovies, capers, fish sauce, garlic, hot chiles, shallots, scallions, soy sauce, vinegar

CURED, SALTY & CHEESY:

bacon, prosciutto, pecorino, Parmigiano-Reggiano, Asiago

HERBAL: basil, bay, chives, marjoram, parsley, sage, savory, tarragon, thyme

SPICY: black pepper, cumin, coriander, curry powders or pastes, dried chiles, smoked paprika

NUTTY: almonds, hazelnuts, pine nuts, sesame seeds, walnuts

RICH & CREAMY: butter, extra-virgin olive oil, sesame oil, aioli or mayonnaise, crème fraîche, coconut milk

FRUITY: lemon and orange juice & zest, tomatoes (fresh, stewed, sun-dried, or roasted)

Sautéed Green Beans with Cranberries & Walnuts

Serves six to eight.

- 2/3 cup (about 3 oz.) dried cranberries**
- 1 1/4 cups fresh orange juice**
- 2/3 cup (2 oz.) walnut halves**
- 3/4 lb. sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice**
- 1/4 cup maple syrup**
- 1/2 tsp. plus 1/4 cup kosher salt; more as needed**
- 1/4 tsp. freshly cracked black pepper; more as needed**
- 1 to 1 1/4 lb. fresh green beans, rinsed well, stem ends trimmed**
- 3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter**
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh sage**

Heat the oven to 350°F.

Put the cranberries and 1 cup of the orange juice in a small bowl and let sit at room temperature for at least 30 minutes.

Spread the walnuts in an even layer on a rimmed baking sheet and toast in the oven until golden brown, about 12 minutes. Transfer the nuts to a plate to cool. When cool, crumble the nuts into smaller pieces.

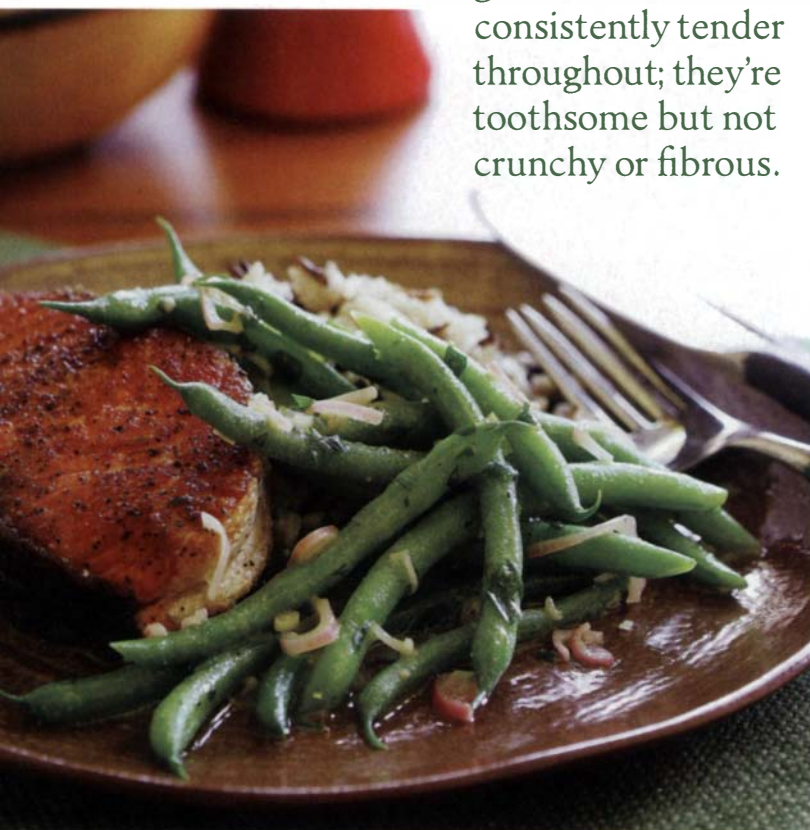
Increase the oven temperature to 450°F. Toss the diced sweet potato with the maple syrup, the remaining 1/4 cup orange juice, the 1/2 tsp. salt, and the black pepper. Spread the potato pieces on the same rimmed baking sheet you used to toast the nuts and roast, stirring occasionally, until just tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Set aside.

Meanwhile, bring 4 qt. water and the 1/4 cup salt to a boil in an 8-qt. pot.

Put the beans in the boiling water, stir once or twice to distribute them, and cook until just tender throughout, 4 to 5 minutes, depending on their size and freshness. Drain the beans well in a colander. (The recipe can be made up to 4 hours ahead to this point. If making ahead, plunge the hot green beans into an ice bath to stop the cooking, drain well in a colander, and set aside until ready to proceed with the recipe.)

When ready to serve, strain the cranberries and reserve the juice. Melt the butter in a large (preferably 12-inch) skillet over medium-high heat until bubbling but not browned. Add the chopped sage and let sizzle for just a few seconds, stirring, to flavor the butter and crisp the sage. Add the green beans and spread them out in the pan. Let them cook for 2 to 3 minutes without stirring. Add the cooked sweet potatoes, toasted walnuts, and strained cranberries. Toss all together and cook, stirring occasionally, for 2 minutes more, to let the ingredients warm and their flavors mingle. Add the reserved orange juice, stir well, and cook until most of the liquid has evaporated, about 1 minute more. Taste and season with salt and pepper as needed. Transfer to a serving dish and serve immediately.

Boiled
green beans are consistently tender throughout; they're toothsome but not crunchy or fibrous.



Green Beans with Mustard-Tarragon Vinaigrette

Serves four to six.

- ¼ cup plus ¼ tsp. kosher salt**
- 1 medium-small shallot, peeled, cut in half lengthwise, and thinly sliced**
- 2 Tbs. tarragon vinegar**
- 1 Tbs. Dijon mustard**
- 1 Tbs. roughly chopped fresh tarragon**
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- ¼ cup good-quality extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1¼ lb. fresh green beans, rinsed well, stem ends trimmed**

Bring 4 qt. water and the ¼ cup salt to a boil in a large saucepan.

Meanwhile, in a medium mixing bowl, whisk together the shallot, vinegar, mustard, tarragon, the ¼ tsp. salt, and black pepper. Slowly whisk in the olive oil.

Add the beans to the boiling water, stir once or twice to distribute them, and cook until tender throughout but not soft, 4 to 5 minutes, depending on the beans' size and freshness. Drain the beans in a colander.

Put the beans in a serving bowl and toss with all of the vinaigrette. Serve immediately.

Spiced Green Beans Braised with Tomato & Onions

Serves four to six.

This classic Lebanese dish is flavored with hints of cinnamon and allspice. It's wonderful with any roasted meat but especially good with lamb.

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 medium onion (about 8 oz.), halved lengthwise, trimmed, and thinly sliced lengthwise (about 2 cups)**
- 1 lb. fresh green beans, rinsed well, stem ends trimmed**
- ½ tsp. kosher salt; more as needed**
- ¼ tsp. freshly cracked black pepper; more as needed**
- 2 cups canned diced tomatoes (from a 28-oz. can), drained**
- 4 large cloves garlic, peeled and thinly sliced**
- 1 tsp. granulated sugar**
- ¾ tsp. ground allspice**
- ½ tsp. ground cinnamon**

In a large (12-inch) skillet with a lid, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and lightly golden, 4 to 5 minutes. Add the green beans, salt, and black pepper, and stir well. Reduce the heat to medium low and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are caramelized and the beans start to soften and brown lightly, about 10 minutes.

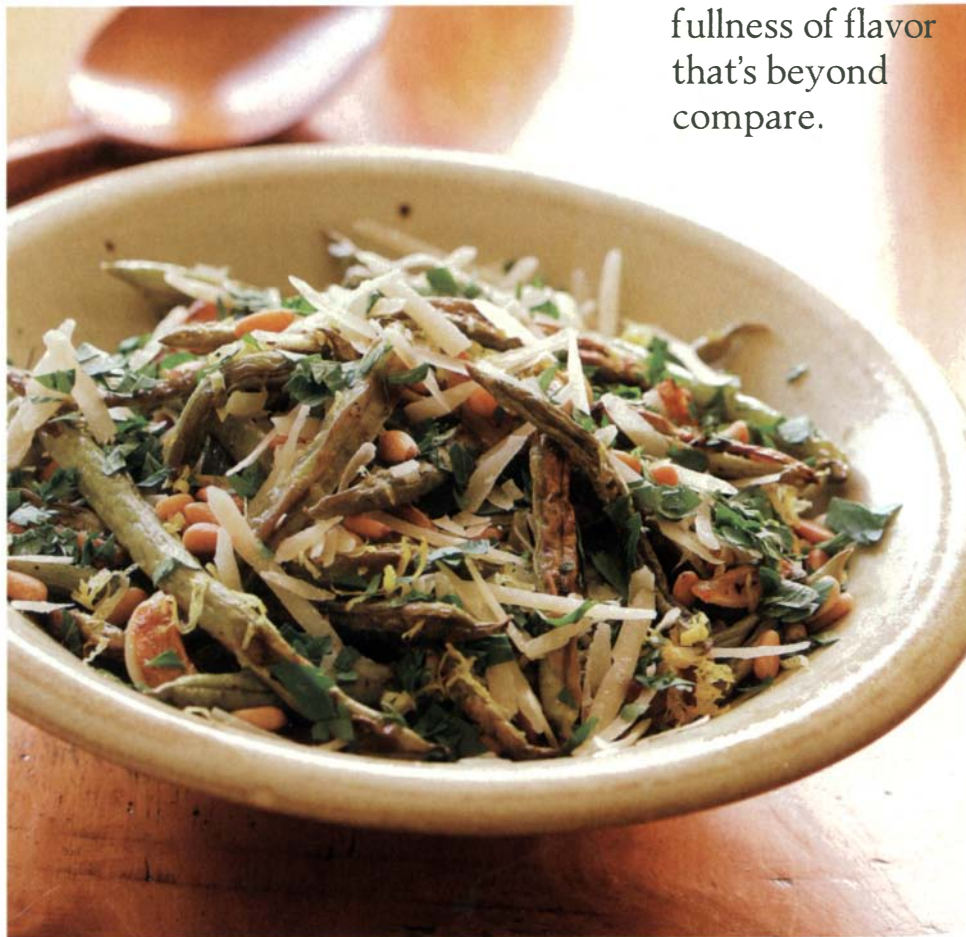
Add the tomatoes, garlic, sugar, allspice, and cinnamon. Stir well, reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the beans are very tender throughout, 15 to 20 minutes, or longer if a softer texture is desired. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Braised green beans become very tender as they absorb the flavors of the other ingredients in the recipe.





Roasted green beans have a caramelized outside and a fullness of flavor that's beyond compare.



Roasted Green Beans with Lemon, Pine Nuts & Parmigiano

Serves four to six.

1 ¼ lb. fresh green beans, rinsed well, stem ends trimmed

1 small head garlic

¼ cup plus 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

1 ½ Tbs. finely grated lemon zest (from 1 to 2 medium lemons), plus 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

1 tsp. kosher salt

½ tsp. freshly cracked black pepper

⅓ cup (about 1 ½ oz.) pine nuts

¼ cup coarsely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

1 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Position oven racks in the top and bottom thirds of the oven. Heat the oven to 450°F.

Put the beans in a large mixing bowl. Peel the garlic, quarter each clove lengthwise (if the cloves are small, halve them), and add them to the green beans. Toss the beans and garlic with ¼ cup of the olive oil, 1 Tbs. of the lemon zest, salt, and pepper.

Spread the beans on a rimmed baking sheet and roast in the top third of the oven for 10 minutes. Stir the beans and garlic with a spatula for more even cooking and coloring. Continue roasting until the beans and garlic pieces are lightly browned and tender throughout, 10 to 15 minutes longer.

Meanwhile, spread the pine nuts out on a rimmed baking sheet and toast in the bottom third of the oven until just golden, about 5 minutes.

Transfer the beans to a small serving platter or shallow bowl and dress with the lemon juice and the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil. Toss gently to coat and season to taste with additional salt and pepper. Sprinkle on the toasted pine nuts, the remaining ½ Tbs. lemon zest, the Parmigiano, and the parsley. Serve hot or at room temperature.

Award-winning chef Ris Lacoste was, until recently, executive chef at 1789 Restaurant in Georgetown, Washington, D.C.; she will be opening a restaurant of her own soon. ♦

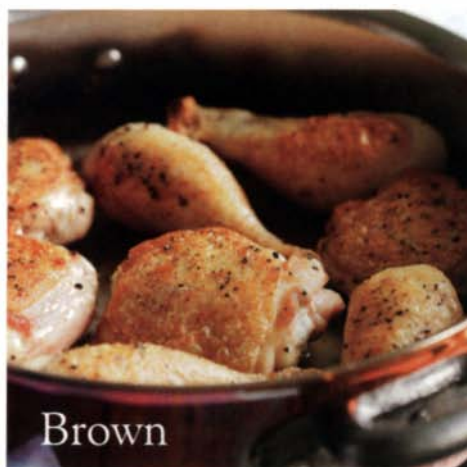
Making Hearty Chicken Braises

For rich flavor and fork-tender chicken, choose thighs and drumsticks and simmer them slowly

BY JENNIFER MCLAGAN

Rushing home from work on a cold winter evening, I dream of finding the kitchen filled with the heady aromas of dinner cooking slowly in the oven. Unfortunately, this doesn't happen very often, given that I'm the one who does most of the cooking. But there's a way I can fill my kitchen with those wonderful cooking smells—and satisfy my taste buds—within an hour or so of arriving home: I make a chicken braise. It's relatively quick (compared to braising other cuts of meat) yet rich and satisfying.

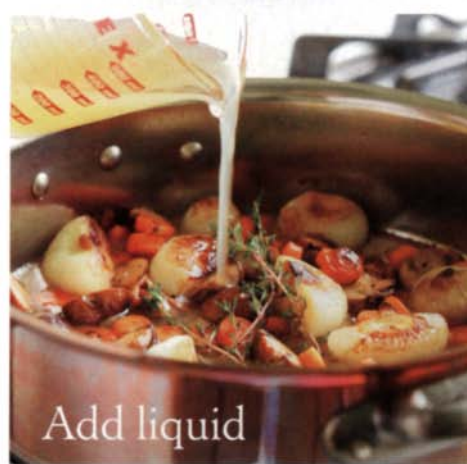
Bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs and drumsticks are best for braising. When chicken legs are simmered slowly, the meat becomes wonderfully tender and falls off the bone; at the same time, it develops a rich, deep flavor. Also, the bones and skin give body and richness to the final sauce, as the thin layer of fat under the skin melts and the collagen in the bones turns into gelatin during cooking. And there's a bonus: With most people clamoring for boneless breasts, the overlooked legs are often a bargain. I like to use a combination of thighs and drumsticks, but there's no reason you couldn't make these braises with one or the other, if you prefer.



Key steps to a perfect chicken braise

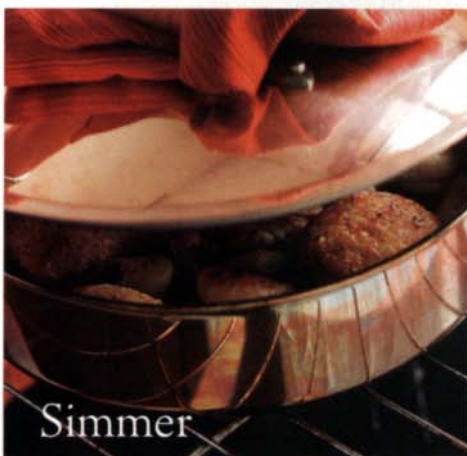
When you're braising chicken (or any other meat, for that matter), you can be as creative as you want with the flavorings, but the technique stays pretty much the same. Here are the steps to follow to get the best results.

Brown the pieces quickly over fairly high heat. This achieves two things: It gives the chicken skin a flavor boost and a nice brown color, and it leaves tasty browned bits on the bottom of the pan, which will dissolve into the sauce. After browning the meat, I remove the chicken pieces from the pan, add aromatics and vegetables (or even fruit), and brown them as well. This adds yet another flavor element to my chicken braises.



Deglaze the pan with a flavorful liquid.

When you add liquid and scrape the bottom of the pan, all the caramelized goodness left behind from browning the chicken becomes part of your sauce. The more flavorful your liquid, the better your braise. I like to use a variety of cooking liquids to give my braises a new guise each time. I prefer homemade chicken broth because I know exactly what went into it—and it tastes better. White or red wine (in combination with chicken broth) adds tanginess and some welcome acidity. Hard cider complements the flavor of apples in a braise that's both sweet and slightly tart. And I use carrot juice for a Moroccan-style braise with cumin, cinnamon, and dates.



Simmer the chicken in the oven. I like to braise in the oven because it provides an all-around even heat with no risk of the chicken sticking to the pot or cooking unevenly, which can happen on the stovetop. Slow simmering delivers a meltingly tender chicken dish, with rich flavors that intensify as it cooks.



A large, straight-sided, ovenproof sauté pan with a lid is ideal for making these chicken braises.

Braised Chicken Legs with White Wine, Bacon, Cipolline Onions & Mushrooms

Serves four.

Serve with mashed potatoes.

- 8 small cipolline onions**
(or 4 large cipolline, halved)
- 4 bone-in, skin-on medium chicken thighs** (1½ to 1¾ lb.)
- 4 chicken drumsticks** (1¼ to 1½ lb.)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil**
- 8 medium cremini mushrooms,**
trimmed and halved
- 3 oz. bacon** (3 strips), cut
crosswise into ¼-inch strips
- 1 medium carrot, peeled and**
sliced in ¼-inch rounds
- 1 cup dry white wine**
- 3 large thyme sprigs**
- 1 cup homemade or low-salt**
canned chicken broth
- 2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F.

Bring a 2-quart saucepan of water to a boil. Drop in the onions and blanch them for 1 minute. Drain in a colander, then shower with cold water to stop the cooking. Peel the onions, leaving enough of the root end intact that they will remain whole while cooking.

Season the chicken pieces generously with salt and pepper. In a straight-sided 10- or 11-inch ovenproof sauté pan with a lid, heat the oil over medium-high heat until very hot. Arrange the chicken pieces skin side down in the pan (it'll be crowded), cover with a splatter screen, if you have one, and cook until deeply browned, about 5 minutes.

Turn the pieces over and cook until the other sides are deeply browned, 3 to 5 minutes more.

Transfer to a plate. Pour out and discard all the fat from the pan.

Put the pan over medium heat. Add the peeled onions, mushrooms, bacon, and carrot to the pan and cook until the bacon is crisp and the vegetables are browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Add the wine and thyme sprigs and bring to a boil, scraping the browned bits from the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon. Boil until the wine has reduced to ½ cup, about 5 minutes. Add the chicken broth and bring to a boil.

Return the chicken pieces to the pan, along with any accumulated juices, and cover. Transfer to the oven and braise until the chicken is fork-tender and the drumstick meat starts to come away from the bone, 45 to 50 minutes.

With a slotted spoon, transfer the chicken, onions, bacon, carrots, and mushrooms to a serving

dish and keep warm by covering the dish loosely with foil. Discard the thyme sprigs. Tilt the sauté pan and skim off as much fat as possible from the sauce. Bring the sauce to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce the heat to medium low, and simmer until the sauce is slightly thickened, skimming off any skin that forms on top, about 5 minutes. Season to taste with pepper (the sauce should be nicely salted at this point). Pour the sauce over the chicken, sprinkle with the thyme leaves, and serve.

What to drink:

Pair this braise with a crisp, mineral white from northern Italy, such as the 2004 Gini Soave Classico, \$16.



Braised Chicken Legs with Cider, Apples & Mustard

Serves four.

Use dry hard cider (which is alcoholic) for this recipe, not fresh sweet cider. Serve over noodles.

- 4 bone-in, skin-on medium chicken thighs (1½ to 1¾ lb.)**
- 4 chicken drumsticks (1¼ to 1½ lb.)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil**
- 2 medium apples such as Rome, Spy, or Mutsu, peeled, cored, and cut into sixths**
- 2 cups dry hard apple cider**
- ¼ cup Dijon mustard**
- 3 large marjoram sprigs**
- ¼ cup heavy cream**
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh marjoram**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F.

Season the chicken pieces generously with salt and pepper. In a straight-sided 10- or 11-inch ovenproof sauté pan with a lid, heat the oil over medium-high heat until very hot. Arrange the chicken pieces skin side down in the pan (it'll be crowded), cover with a splatter screen, if you have one, and cook until deeply browned, about 5 minutes. Turn the pieces over and cook until the other sides are deeply browned, 3 to 5 minutes more. Transfer to a plate. Pour out and discard all but 1 Tbs. of the fat from the pan. Set the pan aside to cool for a few minutes.

Return the pan to medium-high heat, add the apple pieces, and cook, turning

once, until both cut sides are golden brown, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer to a different plate. Carefully pour the cider into the pan and bring to a boil, scraping the browned bits from the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon.

Whisk the mustard into the cider. Return the chicken to the pan, along with any accumulated juices. Add the marjoram sprigs and cover. Transfer the pan to the oven and braise for 10 minutes. Add the apples and continue to braise until the chicken is fork-tender and the drumstick meat starts to come away from the bone, 35 to 40 minutes more.

With a slotted spoon, transfer the chicken and apples to a large serving dish and keep warm by covering the dish loosely with foil. Discard the marjoram sprigs. Tilt the sauté pan and skim off as much fat as possible from the sauce. Bring the sauce to a boil over medium-high heat and whisk in the cream. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until the sauce is slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Pour the sauce over the chicken, sprinkle with the chopped marjoram, and serve.

What to drink:

Try a dry, fruity Riesling from Alsace, such as the 2004 Domaine Albert Boxler, \$24.



Braised Chicken Legs with Carrot Juice, Dates & Spices

Serves four.

The carrot juice and dates lend sweetness to this Moroccan-inspired braise. Serve over cous-cous or rice.

- 4 bone-in, skin-on medium chicken thighs (1½ to 1¾ lb.)**
- 4 chicken drumsticks (1¼ to 1½ lb.)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil**
- 1 large red onion, peeled and thinly sliced (about 3 cups)**
- 1 tsp. ground ginger**
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon**
- ½ tsp. ground cumin**
- 1¼ cups carrot juice**
- ¾ cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**
- ½ lb. (10 to 12) Medjool dates, pitted and halved lengthwise (or 6 whole pitted prunes or dried apricots)**
- 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice**
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F.

Season the chicken pieces generously with salt and pepper. In a straight-sided 10- or 11-inch ovenproof sauté pan with a lid, heat the oil over medium-high heat until very hot. Arrange the chicken pieces skin side down in the pan (it'll be crowded), cover with a splatter screen, if you have one, and cook until deeply browned, about 5 minutes. Turn the pieces over and cook until the other sides are deeply browned, 3 to 5



Braised Chicken Legs with Red Wine, Tomato, Anchovies & Rosemary

Serves four.

Serve with noodles or mashed potatoes.

- 6 oil-packed anchovy fillets, rinsed and patted dry**
- 2 medium cloves garlic, thinly sliced**
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary leaves, plus 1 tsp. whole rosemary leaves**
- 1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth**
- 4 bone-in, skin-on medium chicken thighs (1½ to 1¾ lb.)**
- 4 chicken drumsticks (1¼ to 1½ lb.)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil**
- 1 cup dry red wine**
- 6 plum (Roma) tomatoes, peeled, cut into quarters, and seeded**
- 1 Tbs. red-wine vinegar**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F.

Put the anchovies, garlic, and chopped rosemary in a food processor and process until finely chopped, scraping the sides of the bowl as needed. Add the chicken broth and process again until the ingredients are well blended, about 30 seconds.

Season the chicken pieces generously with salt and pepper. In a straight-sided 10- or 11-inch ovenproof sauté pan with a lid, heat the oil over medium-high heat until very hot. Arrange the chicken pieces skin side down in the pan (it'll be crowded), cover with a splatter screen, if you have one, and cook

until deeply browned, about 5 minutes. Turn the pieces over and cook until the other sides are deeply browned, 3 to 5 minutes more. Transfer to a plate. Pour out and discard all the fat from the pan.

Return the pan to medium-high heat, carefully add the wine to the pan, and bring to a boil, scraping the browned bits from the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon. Pour in the broth mixture. Return the chicken pieces to the pan, along with any accumulated juices. Add the tomatoes and cover. Transfer the pan to the oven and braise until the chicken is fork-tender and the drumstick meat starts to come away from the bone, 45 to 50 minutes.

With a slotted spoon, transfer the chicken and tomato pieces to a large serving dish and keep warm by covering the dish loosely with foil. Tilt the sauté pan and skim off as much fat as possible from the sauce. Bring the sauce to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to medium low and simmer until the sauce is slightly reduced and full-flavored, about 5 minutes. Add the vinegar and whole rosemary leaves. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Pour the sauce over the chicken and serve.

What to drink:

Pair it with a dry rosé from California or southern France, like the 2005 Sola Rosa, California, \$16.

What to drink:

Look for a fruity young red with vibrant acidity such as a Barbera. The 2004 Michele Chiarlo Barbera d'Asti, \$13, is an especially good value.


*Jennifer McLagan is a food stylist and writer. Her first cookbook, *Bones*, won a James Beard Award.* ♦



Just Desserts

Pulling off this sweet buffet is easy because you can make everything ahead

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE



I've long held that dessert is the most essential and anticipated part of any meal, especially during the holidays. So why not create an entire party that's devoted only to desserts? Sure, this is a slightly radical idea, but the way I see it, a dessert party is the ultimate holiday event: unexpected, festive, and ever-so-slightly decadent. A desserts-only bash is also an amazingly carefree way to entertain, because everything can be made ahead. With just a few finishing touches before your guests arrive, you'll be party-ready.

Desserts, clockwise from center:

- ◆ Pistachio-Cranberry Biscotti Straws
- ◆ Double-Ginger Pound Cake
- ◆ Kahlúa Truffle Triangles
- ◆ Nutty Caramel Thumbprints
- ◆ Pumpkin Swirl Cheesecakes



Pumpkin Swirl Cheesecakes

Yields 12 mini cheesecakes.

Cooking spray

2 packages (8 oz. each) cream cheese,
at room temperature

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup granulated sugar

$1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. pure vanilla extract

Pinch table salt

2 large eggs

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup pure solid-pack canned pumpkin

$2\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground cinnamon

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ground ginger

$\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. ground nutmeg

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Line 12 standard muffin tins (approximately $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter) with foil liners and coat lightly with cooking spray.

In the bowl of an electric stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl using a hand-held electric mixer) beat the cream cheese on medium-high speed until very smooth and fluffy, stopping to scrape down the bowl as necessary, about 4 minutes. Add the sugar, vanilla, and salt, and continue beating until well blended and smooth, scraping down the sides of the bowl frequently, about 1 minute; there should be no lumps. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating on medium speed until just blended. (Don't overbeat once the eggs are added or the cheesecakes will puff and crack during baking.)

Transfer $\frac{2}{3}$ cup of the batter to a small bowl. Add the pumpkin, flour, cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg to the small bowl and stir with a wooden spoon until well blended.

Divide the plain batter among the muffin cups (about 2 generous tablespoons in each). Then divide the pumpkin batter evenly among the cups (about 1 generous tablespoon in each). Drag the tip of a wooden skewer, toothpick, or paring knife through the two batters in a random, swirly pattern to create a marbled look.

Bake until the centers of the cheesecakes barely jiggle when nudged, 15 to 18 minutes. Set the muffin tins on a rack and let cool completely. Cover and refrigerate until very cold, at least 6 hours or up to 3 days.

Make-ahead tip:

The baked cheesecakes can be refrigerated, covered, for 3 days or frozen for 1 month. Freeze the cooled cheesecakes in the tins in heavy-duty zip-top plastic bags, or remove them from the tins and arrange in airtight containers.

Pistachio-Cranberry Biscotti Straws

Yields about 2½ dozen biscotti.

$5\frac{5}{8}$ oz. ($1\frac{1}{4}$ cups) all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar

1 tsp. baking powder

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. table salt

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup unsalted shelled pistachio nuts ($3\frac{1}{2}$ oz.)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sweetened dried cranberries ($2\frac{1}{2}$ oz.)

1 large egg

1 large egg white

1 Tbs. finely grated orange zest
(from about 2 oranges)

1 Tbs. fresh orange juice

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. pure vanilla extract

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Line a large cookie sheet with parchment or a nonstick baking liner.

In the bowl of an electric stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt on low speed until well blended. On low speed (or with a wooden spoon if mixing by hand), briefly mix in the nuts and cranberries.

In a small bowl or a 1-cup glass measure, whisk together the egg, egg white, orange zest, orange juice, and vanilla. With the mixer on low speed, slowly pour in the egg mixture (mix in with the spoon if mixing by hand). Continue mixing (or mixing with a wooden spoon or your hands), until the dough is well blended and forms a sticky, moist dough, 1 to 2 minutes.

Dump the dough onto the lined cookie sheet. Using slightly damp hands, shape the dough into a 7x11½-inch rectangle, wetting your hands as needed. Press and shape the dough as evenly as possible.

Bake until the rectangle is golden brown on top and slightly darker brown around the edges, about 25 minutes. Transfer the cookie sheet to a rack to cool for about 10 minutes or until it can be easily handled.

Transfer the biscotti to a cutting board; use a spatula to loosen it from the parchment if necessary. Using a serrated knife, cut the biscotti crosswise into slices about $\frac{1}{3}$ inch thick. (I use a gentle sawing motion to break through the crust. After that, a firm push down on the knife is all that's needed.) Discard the parchment, return the slices to the cookie sheet, and arrange them with a cut side down. (It's all right if they touch because they don't spread.)

Bake until the biscotti are light golden brown and feel dry, about 14 minutes. Transfer the cookie sheet to a rack and cool the biscotti completely; they'll crisp as they cool.



Make-ahead tip:

The cooled biscotti can be frozen for up to 6 weeks or stored at room temperature for up to 3 weeks, layered between sheets of parchment or waxed paper in an airtight container.

Strategy for getting it done

For this kind of party, planning ahead is important. Here's how I break down my to-do list and spread out the work. This way, I never feel rushed or frantic, and I get to enjoy both the process and the party.

Up to 6 weeks ahead:

Make and freeze the Pistachio-Cranberry Biscotti Straws.

Up to 1 month ahead:

Make and freeze the Pumpkin Swirl Cheesecakes.

Bake (but don't fill) the Nutty Caramel Thumbprint cookies and freeze.

Make and freeze the pan of Kahlúa Truffle Triangles (do not cut into triangles).

5 days ahead:

Make the Double-Ginger Pound Cake but don't dust with sugar; store at room temperature.

3 days ahead:

Make the caramel filling for the thumbprint cookies and fill them; store at room temperature.

2 days ahead:

Remove the mini cheesecakes and the Kahlúa truffles from the freezer and thaw, still wrapped, in the refrigerator.

1 day ahead:

Remove the biscotti straws from the freezer and thaw, in the container, at room temperature.

Cut the Kahlúa truffles into triangles, arrange on a rimmed sheet pan in a single layer, cover the pan with plastic, and refrigerate.

Select the serving plates and utensils for the desserts, along with linens, candles, and other table decorations, and set the table.

That morning:

Put the pound cake on a serving plate, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and set on the table.

Arrange the Kahlúa triangles and mini cheesecakes on platters or plates, cover loosely with plastic, and refrigerate.

Taste the biscotti straws and, if you like, refresh their flavor by baking them on a cookie sheet at 350°F for 5 minutes; arrange the biscotti in a tall glass or on a platter and set on the table.

Up to 4 hours ahead:

Make sure you've left room on the table for all of the desserts; some will stay in the fridge until the last minute.

Arrange the thumbprints on a plate or platter, cover loosely with plastic, and set out on the table.

Make the Brown Sugar Mascarpone Whipped Cream, spoon into a serving dish, and refrigerate.

Just before the guests arrive:

Remove plastic wrap from desserts on the table.

Dust the pound cake with sugar. Light the candles.

As guests arrive:

Remove the whipped cream, Kahlúa triangles, and cheesecakes from the fridge and put them on the table.



Double-Ginger Pound Cake with Brown Sugar Mascarpone Whipped Cream

Serves twelve.

FOR THE CAKE:

8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus ½ to 1 Tbs., melted, for the pan
12 oz. (2⅔ cups) all-purpose flour, plus more for the pan
2½ tsp. baking powder
2½ tsp. ground ginger
¾ tsp. table salt
¼ tsp. baking soda
¾ cup granulated sugar
¾ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
4 large eggs
¾ cup buttermilk
½ cup finely chopped crystallized ginger
1 to 2 tsp. confectioners' sugar (optional)

FOR THE BROWN SUGAR WHIPPED CREAM:

8 oz. mascarpone
1 cup heavy cream
¼ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Make the cake: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Grease a 10-cup fluted tube pan with the melted butter, using a brush to get into all the nooks and crannies. Lightly flour the pan, tapping out any excess flour.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, ground ginger, salt, and baking soda. Whisk until well blended and set aside.

In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment or in a large mixing bowl

using a hand-held electric mixer, beat the butter on medium-high speed until smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Scrape the bowl, add the sugar, brown sugar, and vanilla. Continue beating until very well combined and fluffy, about 4 more minutes. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition, and scraping down the bowl as necessary. Add slightly more than half the flour mixture and stir with a rubber spatula until just blended. Add the buttermilk and stir until just blended. Add the crystallized ginger to the remaining flour mixture and use your fingers to break up the clumps of ginger. Add the flour mixture to the batter and stir gently until just blended.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread evenly. Bake until a cake tester or toothpick inserted in the center comes out with just a few small, moist crumbs attached, 50 to 55 minutes. Set the pan on a rack and let cool for about 15 minutes. If necessary, run a knife between the cake and the top edge of the pan to loosen the cake. Invert the cake onto a rack, lift off the pan, and allow the cake to cool completely. If using confectioners' sugar, sift it over the cake just before serving.

Make the whipped cream: In a medium bowl, combine the mascarpone, heavy cream, brown sugar, and vanilla. Using an electric mixer, beat on low speed until the ingredients are combined, about 1 minute. Increase the speed to medium high and continue beating until the cream is thick and holds firm peaks, 30 to 90 seconds. Be careful not to overwhip or the cream will become grainy. Serve with the cake.



A pretty finish

Just before setting the cake on the table, dress it up with a dusting of confectioners' sugar. A sugar shaker is a handy tool, but a sieve works too. For sources, see p. 84.

Make-ahead tip:

Bake the cake up to 5 days ahead but don't dust with sugar. Wrap the cooled cake in plastic wrap and store at room temperature.



A sweet shortcut

This thumbprint recipe offers a great time-saver: using melted store-bought caramels as filling for the cookies. Look for individually wrapped caramels in the candy aisle of the supermarket.

Make-ahead tip:

Baked, unfilled cookies can be frozen for 1 month or stored at room temperature for 5 days. Layer them between parchment or waxed paper in an airtight container.

You can fill the cookies up to 3 days ahead. Arrange them on a sheet pan in a single layer and cover tightly with plastic (don't let it touch the caramel tops). Store at room temperature.

Nutty Caramel Thumbprints

Yields about 2 dozen cookies.

FOR THE COOKIES:

8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2½ oz. (⅔ cup) confectioners' sugar
1½ tsp. pure vanilla extract
½ tsp. table salt
10 oz. (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour

FOR THE CARAMEL FILLING:

22 small caramels (6 oz.), such as Kraft brand
3 Tbs. heavy cream
1½ oz. (⅓ cup) finely chopped pecans, lightly toasted

Make the cookies: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line two cookie sheets with parchment or nonstick baking liners.

In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment or in a large mixing bowl using a hand-held electric mixer, beat the butter, confectioners' sugar, vanilla, and salt on medium speed until well blended and smooth, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the bowl and beater. Add the flour and mix on low speed until a soft dough forms, about 1 minute.

Using two teaspoon measures, scoop up about two teaspoons of dough at a time, and using your palms, roll into smooth balls that are 1 to 1¼ inches in diameter. Arrange them about 1½ inches apart on the lined cookie sheets. Using the back of a ½ teaspoon measure, press down into the middle of each mound to make a well that is almost as deep as the dough ball. (If the edges crack or break open, it's best to reroll and try again—the finished cookie will look better and hold the caramel without leaking).

Bake one sheet at a time until the tops of the cookies look dry and the edges are golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the cookie sheet for 5 minutes and then transfer them to a rack to cool completely.

Make the caramel filling: In a small saucepan, combine the unwrapped caramels and heavy cream. Set the pan over very low heat and cook, stirring constantly, until the caramels have melted and the mixture is smooth, 4 to 6 minutes. Use the caramel while warm.

Arrange the cooled cookies on a cookie sheet or jelly roll pan. Using a small spoon or spatula, drizzle the warm caramel into each indentation, filling to the rim but not overflowing. Scatter the nuts over the caramel and press lightly into the caramel. Cool completely before storing or serving.



Kahlúa Truffle Triangles

Yields about 6 dozen 1½- to 2-inch triangles.

FOR THE CRUST:

6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
3 oz. (¾ cup) confectioners' sugar
¼ tsp. table salt
6 oz. (12 Tbs.) cold, unsalted butter,
cut into 10 pieces, more for the pan
½ tsp. pure vanilla extract

FOR THE FILLING:

1 lb. semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, broken into squares or very coarsely chopped
¾ cup whole or 2% milk
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces
4 large eggs
⅔ cup granulated sugar
2 Tbs. Kahlúa

Make the crust: Position an oven rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line the bottom and sides of a 9x13-inch baking pan with foil, allowing foil to overhang the long sides of the pan to act as handles for removing the cookie later. Lightly butter the foil.

In a food processor, combine the flour, confectioners' sugar, and salt. Process the ingredients briefly to combine, about 15 seconds. Scatter the cold butter pieces and the vanilla over the flour mixture and process, using short pulses, until the dough begins to form small clumps, 1 to 1½ minutes. Turn the dough into the prepared pan. Using lightly floured fingertips, press the dough into the pan in a smooth, even layer. Bake until pale golden, especially around the edges, 22 to 25 minutes. Do not overbake or the crust will be hard and crispy. Transfer the pan to a cooling rack and lower the oven temperature to 325°F.

Make the filling: In a medium bowl, melt the chocolate, milk, and butter together over a pot of barely simmering water or in the microwave. Whisk until smooth and set aside to cool slightly.

In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment or in a large mixing bowl, using a hand-held electric mixer, beat the eggs, sugar, and Kahlúa on medium-high speed until foamy and lighter in color, 2 minutes. Reduce the speed to low and gradually add the chocolate mixture. Stop the mixer and scrape down the bowl and beater. Beat on medium speed until well blended, about 30 seconds.

Pour the chocolate batter over the baked crust and spread evenly. Bake until the sides are slightly puffed and a toothpick inserted near the center comes out wet and gooey but not liquid, 30 to 35 minutes. Transfer the pan to a rack. As it cools, the center may sink a bit, leaving the edges slightly (about ½ inch) elevated. While the filling is still warm, use your fingertips to gently press the edges down to the level of the center, if necessary.

When completely cool, cover with plastic and refrigerate until very cold, at least 12 hours or up to 2 days. To serve, using the foil as handles, lift the rectangle from the pan and set it on a cutting board. Tipping the rectangle, carefully peel away the foil. Using a hot knife, cut the rectangle lengthwise into 1½-inch strips, wiping the blade clean before each cut. Cut each strip on alternating diagonals to make small triangles. Let sit at room temperature for about 5 minutes before serving.

Abby Dodge is the author of many cookbooks, the most recent of which is The Weekend Baker. ♦

Make-ahead tip:

You can bake these up to 1 month ahead: Wrap the cooled baking pan in heavy-duty plastic wrap and freeze (no need to cut them into triangles first).

The baked truffles can also be refrigerated, wrapped in plastic, for up to 2 days.

Pairing drinks with holiday sweets

At this party, you can't go wrong with setting out a selection of coffees and teas for your guests to choose from. If you'd like to serve alcohol too, the key to matching drinks with desserts is to choose liqueurs or wines that are sweeter than the dessert. Try one or more of these ideas:

Coffee liqueurs like Kahlúa always taste good with chocolate or coffee-chocolate desserts. Enjoy the liqueurs in French- or Italian-roast coffee topped with fresh whipped cream, or straight-up in a liqueur glass.

Fruit-based liqueurs like the legendary French raspberry liqueur Chambord work well with any dessert that has a fruit element. Serve fruit-based liqueurs chilled without ice in a liqueur glass, or add an ounce to a glass of sparkling wine or non-vintage Champagne.

A sweet fortified wine, such as Pedro Ximenez sherry or Moscatel sherry, is delicious with chocolate or caramel desserts; serve either at room temperature in a small wine glass.

—Tim Gaiser, contributing editor and master sommelier



Lasagne the Real Deal

BY JOYCE GOLDSTEIN

Learn how to make classic Italian meat lasagne and then adapt it for a vegetarian twist

I can't say I make lasagne every week (I admit it's a bit of a production), but when my family requests it, I'm a pushover. For us, it's both a homey comfort food and a special occasion meal, perfect for a birthday party or a celebration with friends. It takes a little planning on my part—organizing the shopping, making fresh pasta, preparing the filling, and then setting aside a block of time to assemble the final dish—but the results are well worth the time spent in the kitchen. My beef and pork ragù lasagne is soft, rich, and oozing with

deep flavors, and everyone always hopes there will be leftovers to take home.

Three essential components

My technique for making meat lasagne follows the classic northern-Italian approach, which relies on fresh egg pasta, homemade meat sauce, and *besciamella* (Italian for cream sauce).

Fresh egg pasta makes all the difference.

Homemade lasagne noodles are thinner and more delicate than any store-bought pasta, and I like how they almost “float” and meld with the sauces. If you’ve never made your own pasta before, I encourage you to give it a try—it’s not as hard as you might think (see the method on pp. 78–79). I enjoy the meditative ritual of making the dough and folding and rolling silky sheets of pasta through my hand-cranked machine. But if time is short, you can buy fresh pasta sheets at a good pasta shop or use good-quality dried noodles instead. The results will still be excellent, if a little less ethereal.

Homemade ragù ensures satisfyingly rich lasagne. I make a beef and pork ragù that’s very close to the classic long-simmering Bolognese sauce. Although ground meat is convenient, I prefer to dice boneless chuck and pork shoulder myself because it gives the sauce a rustic feel, and I prefer its texture.

Besciamella keeps it soft and smooth. I soften the ragù’s density with homemade cream sauce, which adds richness and helps give lasagne a smooth, creamy texture. I don’t use ricotta or mozzarella in my meat lasagne because I find that the besciamella provides all the richness I need yet keeps the lasagne light.

Sometimes I go vegetarian, replacing the meat sauce with a spinach and ricotta filling. And, because this combination is rather mild, I add a flavorful tomato sauce that’s relatively quick to make. It provides both sweetness and an acidic element that brings the dish together.

Spread out the cooking

Start to finish, my lasagne takes five or six hours to put together, but you don’t have to do it all at once. I make the ragù up to four days ahead and refrigerate it in an airtight container. In fact, I often prepare a double batch and freeze half for a pasta supper. I make the pasta noodles one day, and the next day I cook the noodles, make the cream sauce (while I wait for the pasta water to boil), and assemble the lasagne, which doesn’t take more than 30 minutes. Once it’s assembled, you can bake the dish right away, refrigerate it overnight, or freeze it.

Beef & Pork Ragù Lasagne

Serves eight to ten.

FOR THE RAGÙ:

- 3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 medium celery stalks, finely chopped (1⅓ cups)**
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and finely chopped (⅔ cup)**
- 2 small yellow onions, finely chopped (1⅓ cups)**
- 1 lb. boneless beef brisket or chuck, finely diced or ground (2 cups); see tip below**
- 1 lb. boneless pork shoulder, finely diced or ground (1½ cups); see tip below**
- 8 oz. pancetta, finely diced (1¼ cups)**
- 2 cups dry red wine**
- ½ cup canned tomato purée**
- ¼ cup tomato paste diluted in ½ cup water**
- 2 cups homemade or low-salt canned beef or chicken broth; more as needed**
- 1 cup whole milk**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

TO ASSEMBLE:

- ½ oz. (1 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into small cubes, plus more for the pan**
- ¾ lb. fresh lasagne noodles (store-bought or homemade; see p. 78) cooked as directed at far right; or 1 lb. dried noodles, cooked according to package instructions**
- Double recipe of Basic Cream Sauce (see p. 70)**
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**



Make the ragù: In a 5- to 6-qt. Dutch oven, melt the 6 Tbs. butter with the olive oil over medium heat. Add the celery, carrots, and onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and lightly golden, about 15 minutes. Add the beef, pork, and pancetta and cook, breaking up the meats with a spoon and stirring often, until the meats lose their redness, 5 to 8 minutes. Stir in the wine, tomato purée, and tomato paste and simmer vigorously until the liquid is almost evaporated, 15 to 20 minutes. Add the beef or chicken broth and the milk, cover with the lid ajar, reduce the heat to low, and simmer gently until you have a rich, concentrated sauce, about 2½ hours. Check every 30 minutes to see if more liquid is needed, adding more broth if necessary to prevent scorching. Season to taste with salt and pepper, if needed. Let cool. Skim off the fat from the top, if desired. You should have about 6 cups.

How to chop the ragù meat

Cut each piece into ¼-inch slices. Then cut the slices into thin strips lengthwise and dice the strips crosswise. Alternatively, you can pulse the meat in a food processor, but be careful not to chop it too finely or into a paste.





How to cook fresh lasagne noodles

Prepare a large bowl of ice water. Slip the noodles, two or three at a time, into a big pot of boiling salted water and cook them until they're tender and pale, 3 to 5 minutes (thinner noodles will cook more quickly). To make sure they're done, taste a small piece. If it's still tough, it needs a little more cooking (fresh pasta is not cooked al dente like dried pasta). Carefully scoop the noodles out with a large wire skimmer and slide them into the ice water to stop the cooking. When they're cool, layer them between clean dish towels until you're ready to assemble the lasagne.



An ice bath halts the cooking. Fresh pasta noodles can overcook easily, so have a bowl of ice water ready to cool them quickly.

Towels prevent sticking. Layering the noodles between towels dries them and keeps them separate. They'll keep this way for up to 2 hours.



Assemble the lasagne: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Choose a baking dish that's about 9x12 inches and 3 inches deep, or about 10x14 inches and 2 inches deep. Butter the baking dish. Spread ½ cup of ragù in a sparse layer on the bottom of the dish. Then cover with a slightly overlapping layer of cooked noodles, cutting them as needed to fill the gaps. Spread one-third of the remaining ragù (about 1½ cups) over the first layer of noodles. Drizzle on one-third of the Basic Cream Sauce (about 1 cup) and spread it with a spatula or the back of a spoon. Sprinkle with ⅓ cup Parmigiano. Add a new layer of noodles, overlapping them slightly.

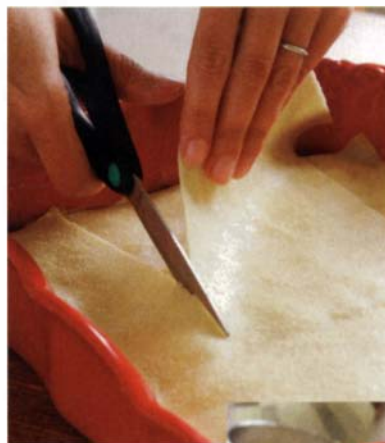
Repeat the layers as instructed above, until all of the filling ingredients are used, to make a total of three layers (you may not need all the pasta). Dot the top with the butter cubes.

Put the baking dish on a baking sheet and bake until heated through and bubbling at the edges, 45 to 50 minutes. Remove from the oven and let rest for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

Make-ahead tip: Prepare the ragù up to four days ahead and refrigerate it. Or freeze it for up to one month. Reheat gently until the sauce is warm enough to spread for assembling the lasagne.

Layering is quick

After all the lasagne components are prepared and the noodles are cooked, the final assembly is fast and gratifying. Start by clearing a good-size space on the counter to lay out all the components.



If one noodle doesn't cover the whole dish, cut a second noodle to fit, overlapping it slightly with the previous noodle.



Spread the ragù over each layer of noodles, followed by the cream sauce and a sprinkle of Parmigiano.

Basic Cream Sauce (Besciamella)

Yields about 1½ cups.

Double this recipe, using a 3-qt. saucepan, to make enough sauce for the ragù lasagne.

1½ oz. (3 Tbs.) unsalted butter
3 Tbs. unbleached all-purpose flour
1¾ cups whole milk, heated
½ tsp. kosher salt
⅓ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
Small pinch freshly grated nutmeg

In a 2-qt. saucepan, melt the butter over medium-low heat. Add the flour and cook, whisking constantly for 2 to 3 minutes. Do not let the mixture brown. Slowly whisk in the hot milk and bring just to a simmer, whisking frequently. Reduce the heat to low and cook, whisking often, until the sauce has thickened to a creamy, gravy-like consistency and no longer tastes of raw flour, 6 to 8 minutes for a single batch, 10 to 12 minutes for a double batch. Remove from the heat and whisk in the salt, pepper, and nutmeg. If not using right away, transfer to a bowl and press a piece of plastic wrap directly on the surface of the sauce to keep a skin from forming. Plan to use the sauce within 30 minutes because it thickens if it's left to sit for too long. If that should happen, add a little warm milk and whisk well to thin it.



Frequent whisking and gentle heat are the keys to a smooth, thick cream sauce.

reader review

A *Fine Cooking* reader gave the beef and pork lasagne a real-world test. Here are the results:

This lasagne is rich and filling but not at all heavy. I think using the homemade pasta with its thinner noodles made a huge difference in keeping the finished dish light. The recipe for the ragù itself is worth having, as it could easily be adapted for other pasta dishes, and hand chopping the meat gave the sauce a very pleasing texture. Specific comments from my guests included, "Wow, it's so light!" and "The flavors are really well balanced."

—Jeff Fortescue,
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Bake, refrigerate, or freeze

You can bake your assembled lasagne right away or refrigerate it for later. It will keep for at least a day in the fridge. Alternatively, you can freeze it for up to four months (make sure you wrap the dish tightly with plastic). Thaw the lasagne in the fridge and bring it to room temperature before baking.

Spinach & Ricotta Lasagne

Serves eight to ten.

I prefer to use fresh spinach, but it takes patience to trim and wash all the leaves. So if you're in a rush, chopped frozen spinach is an acceptable alternative.

FOR THE FILLING:

1½ lb. (about 3 cups) whole milk ricotta
2 lb. fresh spinach, or 2 10-oz. packages frozen chopped spinach, thawed
2 oz. (¼ cup) unsalted butter
½ medium yellow onion, finely chopped (about ½ cup)
3 medium cloves garlic, minced
½ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1 tsp. kosher salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
Pinch freshly grated nutmeg

TO ASSEMBLE:

1 recipe Quick Tomato Sauce (far right)
¾ lb. fresh lasagne noodles (store-bought or homemade; see p. 78) cooked as directed on p. 69; or 1 lb. dried noodles, cooked according to package instructions
1 recipe Basic Cream Sauce (at left)
1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
½ oz. (1 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

Make the filling: Drain the ricotta in a fine sieve set over a bowl for 1 hour, or longer if the ricotta is very wet.





If using fresh spinach, stem and rinse it well; don't dry the leaves. In a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat, cook the spinach until wilted, 3 to 5 minutes. Drain well, squeeze out the excess moisture, and chop finely. If using thawed frozen spinach, squeeze it dry.

Melt the butter in a 10- or 12-inch skillet over medium-low heat and add the onion. Cook until the onion is soft and translucent, 5 to 8 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for about 1 minute. Add the spinach and toss it for 1 or 2 minutes to coat it with the butter. Transfer the spinach mixture to a bowl and let it cool to room temperature. Add the ricotta, Parmigiano, eggs, salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Mix well. You should have about 4½ cups.

Assemble the lasagne: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Choose a baking dish that's about 9x12 inches and 3 inches deep, or about 10x14 inches and 2 inches deep. Spread ½ cup of the Quick Tomato Sauce in a sparse layer on the bottom of the baking dish. Cover the sauce with a slightly overlapping layer of cooked noodles, cutting them as needed to fill the gaps. With a spatula, spread one-third of the spinach and ricotta filling (about 1½ cups) over the first layer of noodles. Then spread one-third of the

remaining Quick Tomato Sauce (about 1⅓ cups) and one-third (½ cup) of the Basic Cream Sauce over the filling. Sprinkle ⅓ cup of the Parmigiano on top. Add a new layer of noodles, overlapping them slightly, and repeat the layers as instructed above, using all of the filling and ending with the Parmigiano, to make a total of three layers (you may not need all the pasta). Dot the top with the butter cubes.

Put the baking dish on a baking sheet and bake until heated through and bubbling at the edges, 45 to 50 minutes. Remove from the oven and let rest for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

Make-ahead tip: You can make the spinach and ricotta filling up to 4 hours ahead and store it in the refrigerator in an airtight container.

Quick Tomato Sauce

Yields about 4½ cups.

3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium carrot, finely chopped
1 medium celery stalk, finely chopped
½ medium yellow onion, finely chopped
¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
5 large basil leaves, chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup dry white wine
1 28-oz. can plus 1 14-oz. can plum tomatoes with juice, coarsely chopped

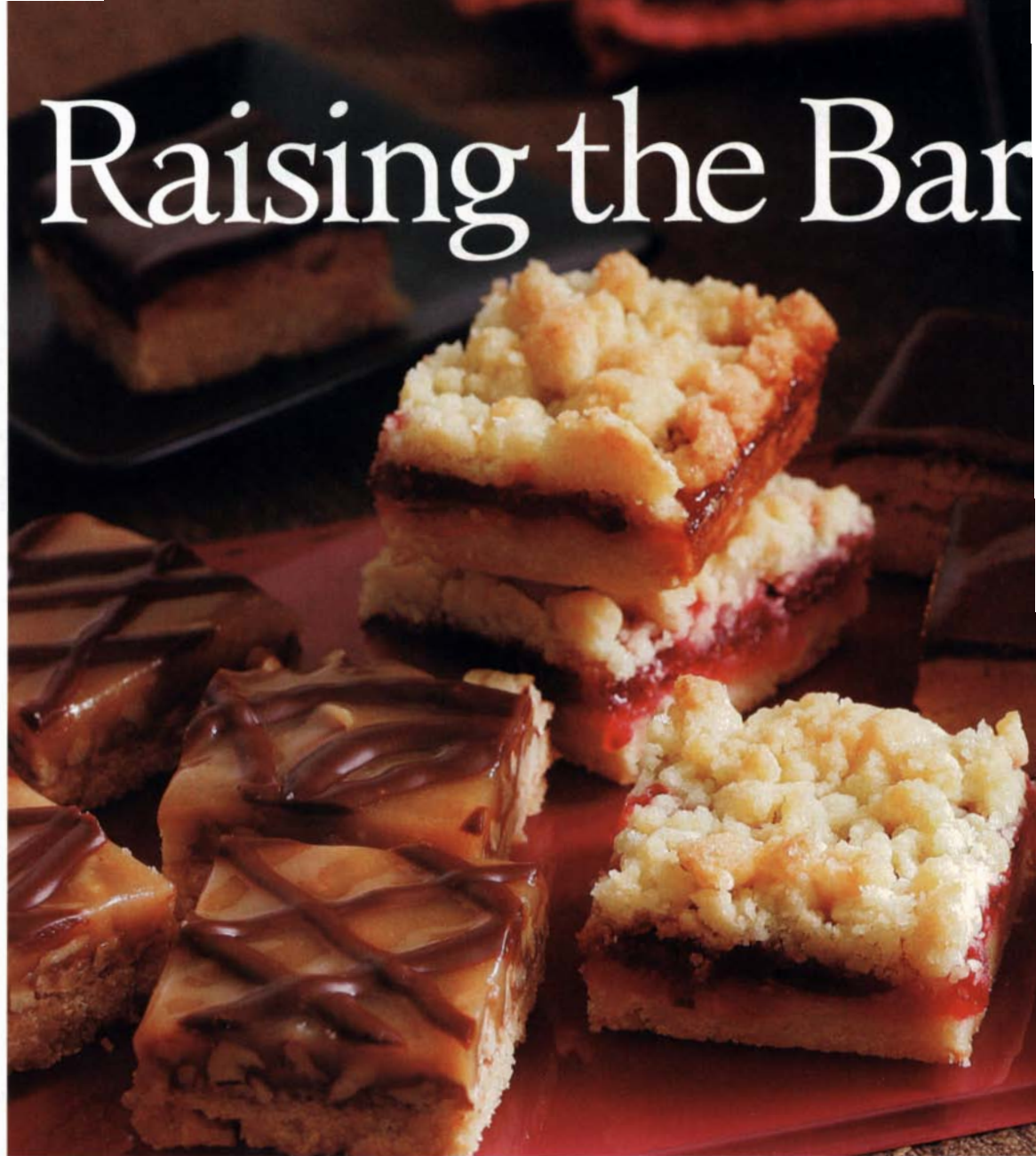
In a 3- or 4-qt. saucepan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the carrot, celery, onion, parsley, basil, a generous pinch of salt, and a couple grinds of pepper. Cook until the vegetables are pale gold, 10 to 12 minutes. Add the wine and cook until it evaporates, about 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes with their juices, stir well, and simmer gently to blend the flavors and reduce the sauce to about 4½ cups, 15 to 20 minutes (adjust the heat as necessary to maintain a gentle simmer). Season to taste with salt and pepper. If you want a smoother texture, pass the sauce through a food mill or purée in a food processor.

Make-ahead tip: This sauce will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for about 5 days. You can freeze it for up to 3 months.

Joyce Goldstein, the former chef-owner of Square One, in San Francisco, teaches and writes about cooking. Her latest book is Antipasti. ♦

Take classic bar cookies to new heights with rich, buttery shortbread crusts

Raising the Bar



BY NICOLE REES

For my holiday baking this year, I decided to upgrade a few classic bar cookie recipes by giving them shortbread crusts. At first, I tried using my favorite shortbread recipe, which makes a great cookie, but it was too delicate and crumbly to work as crust. Clearly, I was going to have to tweak the recipe. My goal was to develop a crust that had the buttery tenderness of shortbread but was crisp and strong enough to be the foundation of a bar cookie.

From cookie to crust: a new mixing method for a new kind of shortbread

Most shortbread recipes are variations on a classic ratio of three ingredients: 1 cup flour, 1/2 cup butter, 1/4 cup sugar. Over the

years, I've tweaked the ingredients, trying out different kinds of flours and sugars, but I never dared tinker with the mixing method. Always, I've begun with soft butter and stuck to the classic creaming method, which yields a tender, slightly sandy shortbread.

Melted butter is the key. In a moment of inspiration, I decided to try stirring melted butter into the dry ingredients instead of beating them together with soft butter. Not only was this method easy, but it delivered the crisp crust I wanted.

Refrigerate the dough before baking. Chilling the dough briefly after pressing it into the pan ensures the perfect texture. Cold dough doesn't puff up and shrink as much as room temperature dough during baking, so the crust is perfectly crispy-crunchy.

And now for the fun: scrumptious toppings

For the toppings, I've chosen classic flavors that everyone loves, because I intend to give these bars as gifts. Two of the bar cookies have nuts and chocolate, always a crowd-pleasing combination. One is topped with crunchy pecans, chewy caramel, and chocolate; the other is covered with a creamy peanut-butter spread and bittersweet chocolate ganache. There's also a lemon bar and a cranberry bar. With its sweet-tart flavor and creamy, delicate texture, my lemon topping is similar to lemon curd but easier to make. The cranberry streusel bars (my favorite) have a tangy cranberry filling that keeps the ultra-rich crust and streusel in check.

Cookie



Lemon Shortbread Bars

Yields 2 dozen 2-inch-square bars.

FOR THE CRUST:

**Non-stick cooking spray,
vegetable oil, or melted butter
for the pan**

**7 oz. (14 Tbs.) unsalted butter,
melted and cooled to just warm**

½ cup granulated sugar

½ tsp. table salt

9½ oz. (2 cups plus 2 Tbs.)

unbleached all-purpose flour

FOR THE LEMON TOPPING:

4 large eggs

1¼ cups granulated sugar

**3 Tbs. unbleached all-purpose
flour**

⅛ tsp. table salt

**¾ cup fresh lemon juice (from 3
to 4 lemons)**

**1 Tbs. packed, finely grated fresh
lemon zest (from 2 lemons,
using a rasp-style grater)**

1 Tbs. confectioners' sugar

Make the crust: Line a straight-sided 13x9-inch metal baking pan with foil, letting the ends create an overhanging edge for easy removal. Lightly coat the sides of the foil (not the bottom) with non-stick cooking spray, oil, or melted butter to prevent the lemon topping from sticking.

In a medium bowl, stir together the butter, sugar, and salt. Stir in the flour to make a stiff dough. Press the dough evenly into the bottom of the prepared pan. Prick the dough all over with a fork. Re-

frigerate the pan for 30 minutes (or freeze for 5 to 7 minutes), until the dough is firm.

Meanwhile, position a rack near the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F.

Bake until the crust is golden and set, about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, make the lemon topping.

Make the topping: In a medium bowl, whisk the eggs, sugar, flour, and salt together until smooth, about 1 minute. Whisk in the lemon juice and zest.

Pour the topping over the hot crust. Return the pan to the oven and increase the heat to 350°F. Bake until the topping is set in the center (it no longer wiggles when the pan is moved) and the edges are golden, 20 to 25 minutes.

Set the pan on a metal rack to cool until the crust is completely firm, at least 1 hour. (For faster cooling, put the bars in the fridge once the pan is no longer piping hot, or even outside in winter.)

When the bottom of the pan is cool, carefully lift the bars from the pan using the foil sides and transfer them to a cutting board. Separate the foil from the bars by sliding a spatula between them. Sift the confectioners' sugar over the lemon topping. Cut the bars into 2-inch squares.

The bar cookies will keep, refrigerated, for 3 to 4 days. Serve at room temperature.

3 tricks for turning classic shortbread into the ultimate bar cookies



Melt the butter and stir it into the sugar and salt for a crust that's rich yet sturdy.



Chill the dough in the pan so it bakes without puffing or shrinking and has a perfectly crisp texture.



Fully bake the crust before you add the toppings—it's the key to keeping that crispness.

All of these bars will keep at room temperature for a week, except the lemon bars; store them in the fridge for up to 4 days.



Peanut Butter & Chocolate Shortbread Bars

Yields 4 dozen 1½-inch-square bars.

FOR THE CRUST:

7 oz. (14 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled to just warm
½ cup granulated sugar
½ tsp. table salt
9½ oz. (2 cups plus 2 Tbs.) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ cup unsalted peanuts, finely chopped

FOR THE PEANUT-BUTTER FILLING:

1 cup creamy peanut butter (not natural but an emulsified variety such as Jif)
3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
6 oz. (1½ cups) confectioners' sugar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

FOR THE GANACHE:

5 oz. good-quality bittersweet chocolate, such as Lindt Excellence, chopped (about 1 heaping cup)
½ cup plus 2 Tbs. heavy cream

Make the peanut shortbread:

Line a straight-sided 13x9-inch metal baking pan with foil, letting the ends create an overhanging edge for easy removal.

In a medium bowl, stir together the butter, sugar, and salt.

Stir in the flour and peanuts to make a stiff dough. Press the mixture evenly into the bottom of the prepared pan. Prick the dough all over with a fork. Refrigerate the pan for 30 minutes (or freeze for 5 to 7 minutes), until the dough is firm.

Meanwhile, position a rack near the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F.

Bake the dough for 20 minutes, then decrease the oven temperature to 300°F and bake until the crust is golden-brown all over and completely set, 20 to 25 more minutes. Let the crust cool completely before topping.

Make the peanut butter filling: Put the peanut butter and butter in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and beat on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Add about half of the confectioners' sugar to the mixer along with the vanilla extract and 1 Tbs. hot water. Beat on low speed until combined, then on medium speed until smooth and fluffy, about 1 more minute. Beat in the remaining sugar and mix, about 1 more minute, until the

mixture is smooth and thick, like frosting. If the filling seems too stiff, add another 1 Tbs. hot water and beat for another minute.

With a knife or metal offset spatula, spread the filling over the fully cooled crust. The filling may not spread smoothly and evenly, but don't worry; the ganache will cover it.

Make the ganache: Put the chocolate in a small heatproof bowl. In a small saucepan, bring the heavy cream to a boil. Remove from the heat and pour over the chocolate. Let sit for 3 minutes. Stir gently with a rubber spatula until combined and smooth.

Spread the ganache over the peanut-butter filling with a metal offset spatula to coat evenly. Let the bars sit at least 3 hours to allow the ganache to set before cutting (or refrigerate for 1 hour).

Carefully lift the bars from the pan using the foil sides and transfer them to a cutting board. Separate the foil from the bars by sliding a spatula between them. Cut the bars into 1½-inch squares. They will keep at room temperature for 1 week.

Caramel Turtle Bars

Yields about 4 dozen 1½-inch-square bars.

FOR THE CRUST:

Non-stick cooking spray, vegetable oil, or melted butter for the pan
7 oz. (14 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled to just warm
½ cup packed light brown sugar
½ tsp. table salt
9 oz. (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour

FOR THE CARAMEL TOPPING:

2 cups pecan halves, toasted and coarsely chopped
1 cup packed light brown sugar
¾ cup heavy cream
4 oz. (½ cup) unsalted butter, cut into chunks
½ cup light corn syrup
¼ tsp. table salt

FOR THE GANACHE:

6 Tbs. heavy cream
2 oz. good-quality bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped (about ½ cup)

Make the shortbread crust:

Line a straight-sided 13x9-inch metal baking pan with foil, letting the ends create an overhanging



edge for easy removal. Lightly coat the sides of the foil (not the bottom) with nonstick cooking spray, oil, or melted butter to prevent the caramel from sticking.

In a medium bowl, stir together the butter, brown sugar, and salt. Stir in the flour to make a stiff dough. Press the mixture evenly into the bottom of the prepared pan. Prick the dough all over with a fork. Refrigerate the pan for 30 minutes (or freeze for 5 to 7 minutes), until the dough is firm.

Meanwhile, position a rack near the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F.

Bake the dough for 20 minutes, and then decrease the oven temperature to 300°F and bake until the crust is golden all over and completely set, about 15 more minutes.

Make the topping: Sprinkle the pecans evenly over the crust.

In a heavy medium saucepan, bring the brown sugar, cream, butter, corn syrup, and salt to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring until all the ingredients are melted and smooth. Let the mixture continue to boil, without stir-

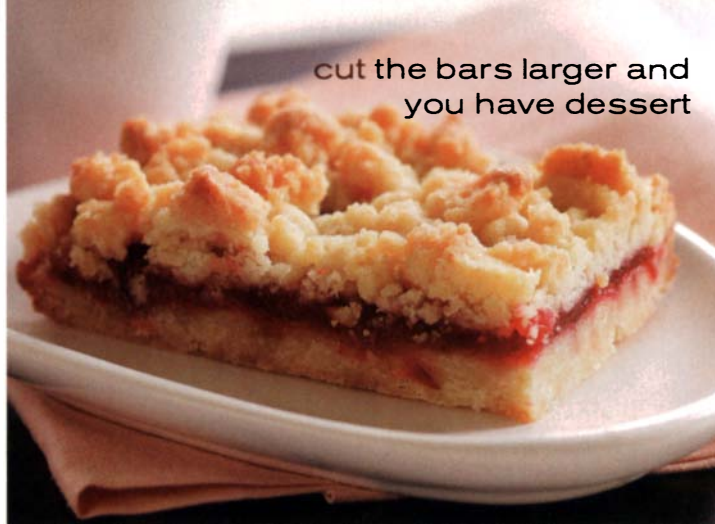
ring, until a candy thermometer registers 240°F, about 6 more minutes. Turn off the heat and immediately (but carefully) pour the caramel evenly over the prepared crust. Let the bars cool completely, about 2 hours, before garnishing with the ganache.

Make the ganache: Put the chocolate in a small heatproof bowl. In a small saucepan, bring the heavy cream to a boil. Remove from the heat and pour over the chocolate. Let sit for 3 minutes. Stir gently with a rubber spatula until combined and smooth.

Fill a plastic zip-top baggie with the ganache, snip the tip off a corner, and drizzle the ganache decoratively over the caramel bars (you don't have to use all the ganache; keep the extra in the fridge for 5 days). Let the ganache set for 30 minutes to an hour. Carefully lift the bars from the pan using the foil sides and transfer them to a cutting board. Separate the foil from the bars by sliding a spatula between them. Cut the bars into 1½-inch squares. They will keep at room temperature for 1 week.



give a gift of turtles



cut the bars larger and you have dessert

Cranberry Streusel Shortbread Bars

Yields about thirty-five 1¾-inch-square bars.

FOR THE CRUST AND STREUSEL:

10½ oz. (1 cup plus 5 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled to just warm
1 cup granulated sugar
¾ tsp. table salt
2 large egg yolks
14¼ oz. (3 cups plus 3 Tbs.) unbleached all-purpose flour

FOR THE CRANBERRY TOPPING:

12-oz. bag fresh or frozen cranberries, picked over, rinsed, and drained
1 cup granulated sugar

Make the crust: Line a straight-sided 13x9-inch metal baking pan with foil, letting the ends create an overhanging edge for easy removal. In a medium bowl, stir together the butter, ¾ cup of the sugar, and the salt. Whisk in the egg yolks. Stir in the flour to make a stiff dough. Transfer about 2 cups of the dough to the prepared pan, and press the mixture evenly into the bottom. Prick the dough all over with a fork. Refrigerate the pan for 30 minutes (or freeze for 5 to 7 minutes), until the dough is firm.

Meanwhile, position a rack near the center of the oven and another near the top. Heat the oven to 325°F.

Bake the dough until the crust begins to set but does not brown at all on the edges (the center will not be firm yet), about 20 minutes. While the crust bakes, prepare the streusel and the topping.

Make the streusel: With your fingers, combine the remaining ¼ cup granulated sugar with the reserved dough until crumbly.

The mixture should hold together when pressed, but readily break into smaller pieces.

Make the cranberry topping:

In a medium saucepan, bring the cranberries, sugar, and ¼ cup water to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium high and continue to boil until the liquid is reduced to a thick syrup, 5 to 8 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and let the mixture cool 5 to 10 minutes—the syrup will continue to thicken as the mixture cools.

Spread the cranberry mixture evenly over the hot crust. Scatter the streusel over the cranberries (don't crumble the streusel too much or the texture will be sandy). Increase the oven temperature to 350°F and bake the bars near the top of the oven until the streusel is golden and set, about 25 minutes. (Baking these bars at the top of the oven helps the streusel brown faster without overbrowning the crust.)

Place the pan on a metal rack to cool until the crust is completely firm, at least 1 hour. (For faster cooling, put the bars in the fridge once the pan is no longer piping hot, or even outside in winter.)

When the bottom of the pan is cool, carefully lift the bars from the pan using the foil sides and transfer them to a cutting board. Separate the foil from the bars by sliding a spatula between them. Cut the bars into 1¾-inch squares. They will keep at room temperature for 1 week.

Baker extraordinaire Nicole Rees is a food scientist and cookbook author. ♦

at the market

Carambola

a fruit shaped like a star



For an unusual addition to a fruit salad or a garnish for a cheese platter or a dessert plate, try a carambola, or star fruit. The fruit is crisp and juicy and vaguely reminiscent of a grape or a pear, with a subtle, mildly sweet flavor that's tropical and floral. The entire carambola, except for its few small seeds, is edible.

A ripe star fruit is extremely fragrant, and its skin is a glossy yellow or greenish yellow. Brown lines on the ridges of the fruit are a sign of ripeness. Choose fruits that are firm, with no blemishes or bruises, and store them in a paper or plastic bag in the fridge for about a week. Sliced star fruit freezes well for a few months.

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BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT

An olive sampler

One of the best supermarket trends these days is the self-serve olive bar near the deli or cheese section. Here's a flavor guide to some of the olives you might come across, either at the olive bar or elsewhere in the store.

1 OIL-CURED (aka dry-cured or salt-cured) Medium black and slightly shriveled, a result of being cured in salt and then rubbed with oil. Less meaty than brine-cured olives, they have a concentrated, pleasantly bitter flavor.

2 PICHOLINE Medium French green olives with a slender almond shape. A soak in lime and wood ash before brining adds to their complex, sweet, slightly floral flavor.

3 NIÇOISE Tiny French olives that are brown to black in color. They have an intensely savory flavor and are often sold in an herbal marinade.

4 GAETA (aka Gyeta) Medium Italian olives cured in either salt or brine. Brine-cured gaetas (shown here) have a tangy yet mild flavor.

5 KALAMATA (aka Calamata) Medium Greek olives with a toothsome texture. Juicy, fruity, and nutty with bright acidic flavor from the vinegar brine in which they're cured. Often sold already pitted, making them convenient for using in recipes.

6 CERIGNOLA Black or green very large, oval, pointy-ended Italian olives with a high flesh to pit ratio. Both colors have a delicate, sweet buttery flavor, but the blacks are quite mild and the greens are slightly tangy. They are often dyed bright red or green.

7 CALIFORNIA (aka Mission or black) Medium to large with a meaty texture; usually sold canned. Their lye curing process leaves them with a very mild to bland flavor.

8 MANZANILLA (aka Manzanillo or Spanish) Widely known as the "martini olive." Usually sold pitted and often stuffed with pimento, they have a meaty texture and a briny flavor.

—Allison Ehri,
test kitchen associate



gifts for the holidays



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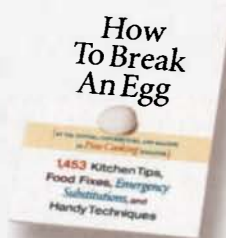
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leftovers:

Prime rib, perfect for a sandwich



Prime Rib Sandwich with Roasted-Garlic Dijonnaise

Serves four.

The sandwich is better if the beef isn't refrigerator-cold, so either let the sliced beef warm at room temperature for about 15 minutes, or warm the sandwiches in the residual heat from the broiler after you've toasted the rolls.

FOR THE DIJONNAISE:

6 cloves garlic, peeled
3 sprigs rosemary (3 to 4 inches each)
1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Several pinches kosher salt
¼ cup mayonnaise
1 tsp. Dijon mustard

TO ASSEMBLE THE SANDWICHES:

4 sandwich rolls, such as Kaiser or club rolls
12 oz. thinly sliced leftover Slow-Roasted Prime Rib (about 2 cups; recipe, p. 44)
2 cups sliced onion, sautéed
2 cups sliced mushrooms, sautéed

Make the Dijonnaise: Heat the oven to 350°F. Put the garlic in the center of a square of foil and arrange the rose-

mary sprigs on top. Drizzle the oil over the rosemary and garlic, and sprinkle with a pinch of salt. Gather the foil around the garlic into a pouch and put the pouch in a pie plate or other small baking dish (in case the oil leaks). Roast until the garlic is light golden and completely soft, about 30 minutes. Open the foil and let cool briefly. Discard the rosemary sprigs. Transfer the garlic to a small bowl and reserve the oil in the foil. Mash the garlic with the back of a spoon, and then stir in the mayonnaise, mustard, ½ teaspoon of the garlic-rosemary oil, and a small pinch of salt.

Assemble the sandwiches:

Position a rack 3 to 4 inches from the broiler element and heat the broiler on high. Slice the rolls in half, set cut sides up on a baking sheet, and brush with the remaining rosemary-garlic oil. Toast under the broiler until golden brown, about 1 minute. Spread some Dijonnaise on the top and bottom of each roll. Arrange the beef over the bottom halves along with the sautéed onions and mushrooms and replace the tops.

technique class

How to

I can't argue with Joyce Goldstein ("Lasagne, The Real Deal," p. 67) when she says fresh homemade egg pasta is the best choice for making great lasagne. I have yet to find a store-bought pasta that matches the rich flavor and light, ethereal texture of good homemade pasta.

Making your own pasta takes a bit of time—the dough is fast to make, but rolling it into thin sheets takes about 45 minutes (though it goes faster with practice). You'll need a food processor, a pasta rolling machine (see Equipment, p. 28), and lots of kitchen towels and counter space for laying out your pasta sheets.

—Laura Giannatempo, assistant editor

Fresh Egg Pasta

Yields about 1 lb., enough for one pan of lasagne, pp. 67–71.

The pasta dough can be refrigerated for 24 hours or frozen for up to 1 month, either before or after rolling into sheets.

10 ounces (2¼ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more for kneading and rolling
1 tsp. kosher salt
1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
4 large eggs, lightly beaten

Make the dough:

Put the flour and salt in a food processor fitted with the plastic dough blade. Pulse three or four times to blend. With the processor running, pour the olive oil down the feed tube and then slowly pour in the eggs. Continue processing until the dough clumps around the blade, about 10 seconds. It will be a little wet and sticky.

Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface and knead it by hand until it's smooth, about 2 minutes.

make fresh pasta

If it seems very sticky and too wet, add a little more flour and continue kneading for 1 more minute. Shape the dough into a ball and dust it lightly with flour. Wrap tightly with plastic and let rest at room temperature for 30 minutes (or refrigerate or freeze).

Roll out the dough:

Unwrap the dough ball and cut it into four equal pieces. (Let refrigerated dough come to room temperature; defrost frozen dough in the fridge and let it come to room temperature.) Take one piece and leave the other three covered in plastic. Flatten the piece of dough with the palm of your hand until it's about 1/2 inch thick and shape it as close to a rectangle as possible.

Dust the flattened piece lightly with flour and pass it through the machine rollers at the widest setting **1**.

Fold it in three, like a letter **2**.

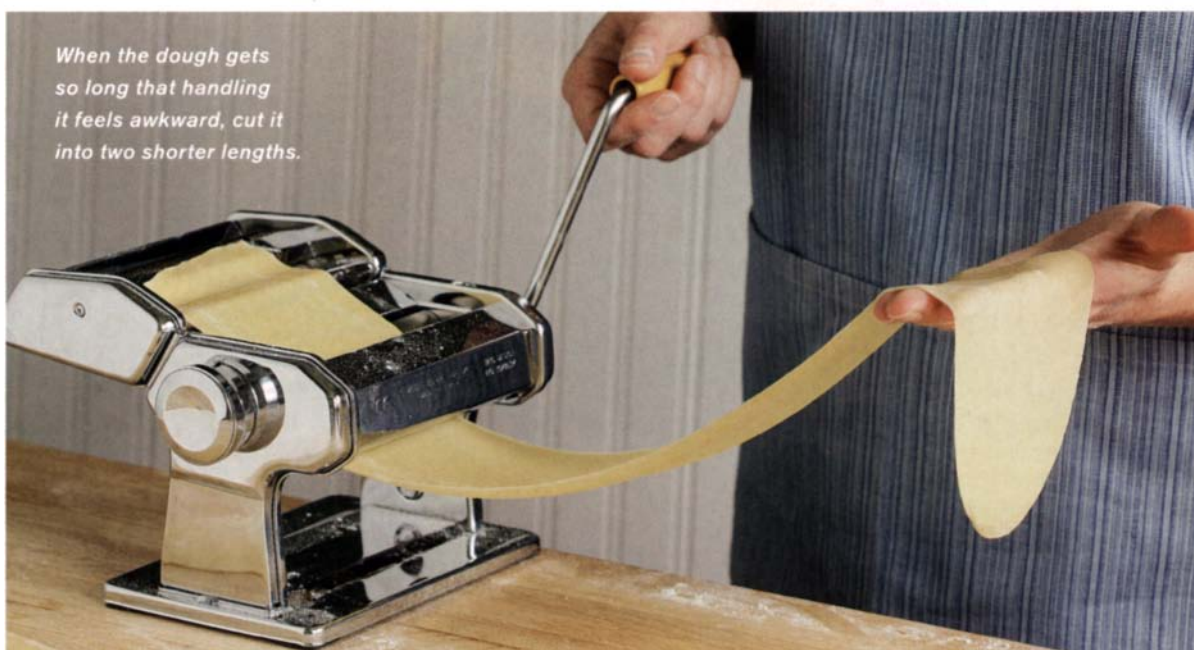
Dust the dough with more flour and pass it through again, still folded, starting from a short side. Repeat this step two or three times, folding the dough in three each time and dusting with flour as needed **3**.

Then without folding the dough, repeatedly pass it through the machine rollers, reducing the space between the rollers after each pass (dust the dough with flour on both sides before each pass) **4**.

When the dough becomes so long that it's difficult to manage, trim the uneven ends and cut the dough in half crosswise to make two more-manageable lengths of dough. Continue passing each piece through progressively narrower settings. Because each machine is differ-

ent, it's difficult to say at what exact setting to stop. For lasagne, you want the pasta to be thin enough that it's slightly translucent but not so thin that it will tear—no thicker than 1/16 inch. It's usually best to stop a setting or two before the final (thinnest) setting—#5 or #6 on a KitchenAid attachment, #7 or #8 on an Atlas machine (for more on pasta machines, see p. 30). You can continue through the last setting for other types of pasta, like fettuccine, linguine, or ravioli.

As you finish rolling each sheet, set it on a lightly floured kitchen cloth and cover with another cloth to prevent the dough from drying out. Or, if not using within an hour or so, layer the sheets between parchment, plastic wrap, or waxed paper to keep them from sticking together and refrigerate or freeze.



ingredient profile

Chipotle chiles en adobo



Where to find: Any Mexican or Latin food market will have them, and many supermarkets carry chipotles en adobo in their Mexican food sections, or see p. 84 for a mail-order source.

When I want to add a hit of hot, smoky flavor to my cooking, I like to reach for a can of chipotle chiles en adobo. Chipotles are dried, smoked jalapeños. Adobo is a tangy, slightly sweet red sauce. Put them together in a can and they become a versatile pantry staple. You can use just the chipotles for intense smoky chile heat or just the sauce if you want a sour-sweet flavor and a slightly less fiery smoky heat. Or you can use them together, as in the recipe below.

How to use: The chipotles are soft and ready to go straight from the can. They can be quite spicy, but you can temper the heat a bit by scraping out the seeds. The size of chipotles often varies, so if a recipe calls for two chipotles and you choose the biggest one, you might want to use just one.

How to store: Transfer unused chiles and sauce to an airtight container—preferably glass, as the sauce tends to stain plastic—and refrigerate for about a month. Or try freezing individual chiles in an ice cube tray and then transfer the cubes to a zip-top freezer bag. Frozen, they'll keep for about three months.



Warm Black Bean & Chipotle Dip

Serves ten to twelve.

This is a great party dip that can be fully assembled up to 2 days ahead. Keep covered and refrigerated until ready to bake.

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for the baking dish
2 medium tomatoes, cored and cut into medium dice
2 tsp. kosher salt; more as needed
1 large yellow onion, finely diced
3 large cloves garlic, minced
1 Tbs. chili powder
2 15½-oz. cans black beans, rinsed and drained well
2 canned chipotles en adobo,

minced (about 1 Tbs.), plus 3 Tbs. adobo sauce
3 Tbs. cider vinegar
1½ cups fresh or frozen corn kernels (if frozen, thaw first)
1½ cups (6 oz.) grated sharp cheddar cheese
1½ cups (6 oz.) grated Monterey Jack cheese
¾ cup chopped fresh cilantro
Freshly ground black pepper
Tortilla chips for serving

Heat the oven to 425°F. Grease a 1½-qt. baking dish with oil and line a baking sheet with foil. Set the tomatoes in a colander over the sink and sprinkle with 1 tsp. of the salt. Heat the oil in a large (12-inch) skillet over medium-

high heat until shimmering hot. Reduce the heat to medium, add the onion, sprinkle with 1 tsp. salt, and cook, stirring, until softened and translucent, 4 to 6 minutes. Add the garlic and chili powder and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add half of the black beans, the chipotles and adobo sauce, and ¾ cup water and bring to a boil. Cook until the liquid reduces by about half, 2 to 3 minutes.

Transfer the bean mixture to a food processor, add the vinegar, and process until smooth. Let cool for a couple of minutes and then transfer to a large bowl. Add the rest of the beans, the tomatoes, corn, half of each of the cheeses, and ½ cup of the cilantro. Mix well and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Transfer to the baking dish and sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Bake on the foil-lined baking sheet (to catch drips) until the cheese melts and browns around the edges, about 15 minutes (longer if refrigerated). Sprinkle with the remaining cilantro and serve with the tortilla chips for dipping.

—Tony Rosenfeld,
contributing editor



Buying peanuts? Read the fine print

Say you want to make a recipe that calls for peanuts, such as the Peanut Butter Sandwich Cookies on p. 14a. But at the store, you're confronted with an array of peanuts, all labeled differently.

When we shop for peanuts, we look to the ingredient list on the package—if it reads peanuts, oil, and salt (unless the recipe specifies unsalted peanuts), we know we have the right nut. These peanuts go by a number of names, including roasted, cocktail, and Virginia peanuts. (None of these peanuts are really roasted; they're fried, usually in peanut oil, and their flavor is rich and purely peanut.)

Unless a recipe specifically calls for them, avoid "dry-roasted peanuts" for cooking and baking—they tend to be seasoned with spices and flavorings that don't always go with the other flavors in a recipe. Dry-roasted peanuts, as the name implies, are cooked in an oven by forced hot air, and oil is not in the ingredient list.

—Allison Ehri,
test kitchen associate

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The two meanings of “prime rib”

Rich and flavorful (and pricey), prime rib is typically reserved for special-occasion meals, like our holiday menu on pp. 40–47. What you may not realize is that the term “prime rib” has two definitions. It refers to both a particular cut of beef and to a USDA grade of beef. To help you talk the talk at the butcher counter, here’s an in-depth explanation of “prime.”



Prime rib: the cut

A prime rib roast, or standing rib roast, is cut from the back of the upper rib section of the steer, and it usually comprises a total of seven ribs. To make the Slow-Roasted Prime Rib on p. 44, you’ll need a three-bone rib roast, which can be cut either from the chuck end or the loin end of the rib section.

The chuck end (aka the large end or second cut) is bigger in overall size, but it has a smaller rib eye, with several thick layers of fat interspersed between portions of lean meat.

Author Suzanne Goin prefers a three-bone rib roast cut from the loin end—called the small end or first cut. It’s smaller in overall size, but it has a larger rib eye, meaning more meat and less fat.

Prime: the grade

Prime is the best USDA grade of beef available, having the most marbling (flecks of fat interspersed in the meat) and therefore the best flavor and tenderness. Because of its expense, most Prime beef ends up in restaurants. The grade below Prime is Choice, the grade most supermarkets carry. When you ask for a prime rib at a supermarket, chances are the counterperson will assume you’re referring only to the cut, not the grade, and you will receive a Choice grade prime rib. The quality of Choice grade beef is still quite good, and since a rib roast is a rather fatty cut to begin with, a Choice grade prime rib will make a fine roast. That said, if you want to splurge on the best, you’ll need to order a prime (grade) prime rib, and you may have to seek out a specialty butcher shop or high-end supermarket to find one.

The bottom line

At the market, ask for a small-end (or first-cut) three-bone beef rib roast. If that doesn’t ring a bell with the meat person, ask for the roast to be cut from the loin end. The grade—Prime or Choice—is up to you and your wallet. ♦

If you want to splurge on the best, ask the butcher for a prime (grade) prime rib.

How to carve a beef rib roast



1 Using a long, sharp slicing knife or chef’s knife, cut the meat from the rib bones in one piece, following the contour of the bones.



2 Slice the meat across the grain into whatever thickness you prefer. If you like, cut between the bones to make individual ribs for gnawing on in the privacy of your kitchen.



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Front Cover

For more information on the dinnerware pictured, visit Mikasa.com and search under "Formal China" for the "Ridge Platinum" pattern.

Back Cover

A heavy, 1½- to 2-quart fondue pot that can go from stove to table is best for the back-cover recipe. ChefsResource.com (866-765-2433) carries several brands of enameled cast-iron fondue pots appropriate for cheese fondue (from \$89.95), including Le Creuset, Staub, and Swissmar.



Prime Rib, p. 40

Suzanne Goin calls for fleur de sel for seasoning the Slow-Roasted Prime Rib. You can find it in specialty stores or online at Saltworks.us (800-353-7258), at \$9 for a 4.4 oz. container. To roast the prime rib, you'll need a large, heavy-duty roasting pan. A few of our favorites are from KitchenAid (\$149 at ShopKitchenAid.com), Mauviel Cook Style (\$199.95 at Cooking.com), and Viking (\$274.95 at ChefsResource.com).

And for the Chocolate Caramel Tart with Macadamia Nuts and Crème Fraîche Whipped Cream, look for an 11-inch round fluted tart pan with a removable bottom; they're sold in most kitchenware stores, or visit CooksWares.com (800-915-9788) where they're \$9.99 apiece.

Dessert Party, p. 60

For a fluted tube pan (also known as a bundt pan, go to SurLaTable.com (800-243-0852), which carries 10-cup pans starting at \$31.95. Visit The Baker's Catalogue (KingArthurFlour.com; 800-827-6836) for parchment (from \$7.95) and standard muffin tins with cups that are 2¾ inches in diameter (\$18.95). They also sell cookie sheets (look for the "edgeless" ones) in sets of two for \$24.95.

You can find sugar shakers with perforated tops in many kitchenware stores, or visit Amazon.com, where Cuisipro's cocoa/sugar shaker sells for \$11.99.



Hors d'Oeuvre, p. 48

Cooking.com (800-663-8810) sells many brands of mini muffin pans; prices start at \$4.95 for pans with 12 cups and \$14.95 for pans with 24 cups. If you're looking for bamboo steamers like the ones pictured, Cooking.com has them also, in 6-inch (\$9.95) and 10-inch sizes (\$15.95).

Green Beans, p. 52

To coarsely grate the Parmigiano-Reggiano for the roasted green beans, Ris Lacoste likes to use a Microplane coarse grater or fine ribbon grater; both sell for \$12.95 at CutleryAndMore.com.

Braised Chicken, p. 56

The only cookware you'll need for these dishes is a 3-quart, straight-sided, ovenproof sauté pan with a lid. We like All-Clad's version, available at ThePepperMillinc.com (866-871-4022) for \$174.99.

Lasagne, p. 67

Look for a lasagne pan that's about 10x14x2 inches or 9x12x3 inches. One to try: Mario Batali's enameled cast-iron lasagne pan, \$59.99 at Amazon.com. Joyce Goldstein recommends Rustichella d'Abruzzo dried egg lasagne noodles when you don't have time to make fresh noodles; they sell for \$7 for an 8.8 oz. box at SalumeriaItaliana.com (800-400-5916).

Bar Cookies, p. 72

You'll need a straight-sided 9x13-inch pan for the bar cookies. If you don't have one, try KitchenConservatory.com (866-862-2433), where Magic Line brand pans are \$18.95 apiece.

From Our Test Kitchen, p. 76

Star fruit is available in many grocery stores. If you can't find it and want to mail order, go to Melissas.com (800-588-0151).



Canned chipotles en adobo are sold in many grocery stores, or look online at EthnicGrocer.com (\$2.99 for 7-oz. can).

Specialty stores or Whole Foods markets are good sources for various olives (Kalamata, picholine, Niçoise, Gaeta, Manzanilla, Cerignola, and Mission). You can also visit CyberCucina.com (800-796-0116) to order many of these varieties online. ♦



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Fiesta Shrimp Appetizer

Ingredients

1 jar CROSSE & BLACKWELL® Zesty Shrimp or Seafood Sauce
2 8-ounce packages cream cheese, softened
1 pound cooked shrimp, chopped
1/2 cup Kalamata olives, pitted & chopped
1/2 red bell pepper, chopped
1 bunch green onions, chopped
1 jalapeno chile pepper, seeded & minced

Directions

Spread cream cheese over a large platter; top with Shrimp Sauce. Sprinkle with remaining ingredients. Cover and chill until served.



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Ingredients

2 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
1 cup sliced peaches
1/2 cantaloupe, cut into 1" pieces
1/2 cup CROSSE & BLACKWELL® Mint Flavored Apple Jelly

1/2 cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons white vinegar
lettuce

Directions

Toss together blueberries, peaches and cantaloupe. Heat Jelly over low heat until texture is smooth. Whisk mayonnaise and vinegar into Jelly; blend until smooth. Place lettuce in a large serving bowl; top with fruit; drizzle with dressing and serve immediately.



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Mango Chutney Stir Fry

Ingredients

1 jar CROSSE & BLACKWELL® Hot Mango Chutney
2 tablespoons hot chili oil
1 pound fresh jumbo shrimp, peeled & deveined
1 cup pea pods
1 cup onions
1 teaspoon garlic, chopped
1/2 cup stir-fry sauce
2 tablespoons cashews

Directions

Heat chili oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Fry shrimp for 3 minutes or until pink. Remove shrimp from pan. Add pea pods, onions and garlic to skillet along with stir-fry sauce and sauté for 5 to 10 minutes. Add Chutney and the cooked shrimp. Heat through. Sprinkle with optional cashews and serve.



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nutritioninformation

Recipe	Page	Calories		Protein	Carb	Fats (g)				Chol.	Sodium	Fiber	Notes
		total	from fat	(g)	(g)	total	sat	mono	poly	(mg)	(mg)	(g)	
Letters	10												
Butter-Roasted Almonds		260	200	8	9	22	3	13	4.5	5	250	5	per ¼ cup
12 Great Cookies	14a												
Almond Biscotti		110	30	3	17	3.5	0	2	1	35	50	1	per cookie
Raspberry Bars		180	81	2	24	9	4	4	1	25	10	1	per cookie
Cocoa Walnut Butter Cookies		60	35	1	7	4	1	1.5	1.5	10	30	0	per cookie
Coffee Thins		70	35	1	8	4	2.5	1	0	10	15	0	per cookie
Toasted Almond Butter Thins		35	20	1	4	2.5	1	1	0.5	5	15	0	per cookie
Blondies		190	80	2	28	9	4	3	1	40	40	1	per blondie
Sugar Cookies		120	60	1	12	7	4.5	2	0	20	25	0	per cookie
Peanut Butter Sandwich Cookies		390	230	8	36	25	11	10	4	45	290	2	per cookie
Chewy Cranberry-Oatmeal Cookies		130	60	2	17	7	3	1.5	2	20	60	1	per cookie
Orange-Hazelnut Shortbread Cookies		100	60	1	9	6	3.5	2.5	0	15	35	0	per cookie
Chocolate Chunk Cookies		140	70	2	18	8	4.5	1.5	0	25	70	1	per cookie
Double-Ginger Crackles		80	25	1	12	3	2	1	0	10	40	0	per cookie
In Season	20												
Clementine Granita		230	5	1	57	0	0	0	0	0	35	1	based on 4 servings
Holiday Menu	40												
White Bean Soup w/ Mushrooms & Chive Mascarpone		490	280	15	40	32	10	16	2.5	40	700	9	based on 8 servings
Arugula, Mint & Apple Salad w/ Buttermilk Dressing		230	180	4	11	20	3.5	2.5	7	10	170	3	based on 6 servings
Slow-Roasted Prime Rib		750	555	45	2	62	26	26	2.5	175	1400	0	based on 8 servings
Roasted Carrots & Shallots w/ Olives & Gremolata		200	130	2	17	14	2	10	1.5	0	400	5	based on 6 servings
Smashed Potatoes w/ Horseradish Crème Fraîche		270	170	4	21	19	12	5	0.5	45	610	4	based on 6 servings
Chocolate Caramel Tart w/ Crème Fraîche Whipped Cream		440	300	4	36	34	17	12	1	80	40	2	based on 16 servings
Hors d'Oeuvre	48												
Spinach, Feta & Sun-Dried Tomato Phyllo Triangles		60	40	2	4	4.5	2.5	1.5	0	20	115	0	per triangle
Pork Shiu Mai		40	10	2	5	1.5	0	0.5	0	5	80	0	per piece
Soy Dipping Sauce		15	10	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	440	0	per 1 Tbs.
Bacon, Leek & Cheddar Mini Quiches		110	70	3	7	7	2.5	3.5	0.5	25	180	0	per quiche
Green Beans	52												
Green Beans w/ Mustard-Tarragon Vinaigrette		120	80	2	8	10	1.5	7	1	0	330	3	based on 6 servings
Sautéed Green Beans w/ Cranberries & Walnuts		250	130	3	30	15	6	3	4.5	25	360	4	based on 8 servings
Spiced Green Beans Braised w/ Tomato & Onions		120	80	2	10	9	1.5	7	1	0	460	3	based on 6 servings
Roasted Green Beans w/ Lemon, Pine Nuts & Parmigiano		220	170	4	13	19	2.5	11	4	0	340	4	based on 6 servings
Braised Chicken	56												
Braised Chicken Legs w/ Carrot Juice, Dates & Spices		550	210	33	56	24	5	9	7	105	690	6	based on 4 servings
Braised Chicken Legs w/ Cider, Apples & Mustard		480	270	32	15	30	9	11	7	125	1040	1	based on 4 servings
Braised Chicken Legs w/ White Wine, Bacon & Mushrooms		460	240	36	10	26	6	11	7	110	850	2	based on 4 servings
Braised Chicken Legs w/ Red Wine, Tomato & Rosemary		430	220	34	7	24	6	10	7	110	900	1	based on 4 servings
Dessert Party	60												
Kahlúa Truffle Triangles		90	50	1	9	6	3.5	1	0	20	15	1	per triangle
Double-Ginger Pound Cake		400	160	6	56	18	11	5	1	115	310	1	per slice, w/o cream
Brown Sugar Mascarpone Whipped Cream		60	50	1	2	6	3	1.5	0	20	5	0	per 2 Tbs.
Nutty Caramel Thumbprints		170	90	2	17	10	6	3	1	25	70	0	per cookie
Pistachio-Cranberry Biscotti Straws		60	15	2	10	1.5	0	1	0	5	35	1	per straw
Pumpkin Swirl Cheesecakes		190	130	4	13	14	9	4	0.5	75	150	0	per cheesecake
Lasagne	67												
Beef & Pork Ragù Lasagne		620	350	30	29	39	17	15	3	170	1140	2	based on 10 servings
Spinach & Ricotta Lasagne		470	250	20	33	28	15	10	1.5	165	920	5	based on 10 servings
Bar Cookies	72												
Lemon Shortbread Bars		170	70	2	24	8	4.5	2	0	55	75	0	per bar
Cranberry Streusel Shortbread Bars		150	60	1	21	7	4.5	2	0	30	50	1	per bar
Caramel Turtle Bars		160	100	1	15	11	5	4	1	20	45	1	per bar
Peanut Butter & Chocolate Shortbread Bars		150	100	3	13	11	5	3	1	15	50	1	per bar
Test Kitchen	76												
Fresh Egg Pasta		160	35	6	23	4	1	2	0	95	160	1	per 2 oz.
Prime Rib Sandwich w/ Roasted Garlic Dijonnaise		710	430	28	40	48	13	18	3	75	670	2	based on 4 servings
Warm Black Bean & Chipotle Dip		230	110	12	19	12	6	4.5	0.5	30	510	4	based on 12 servings
Quick & Delicious	94a												
Sun-Dried Tomato Tart w/ Fontina & Prosciutto		170	100	6	11	11	4	5	1	25	390	1	based on 8 servings
Arugula & Radicchio Salad w/ Ruby Grapefruit		150	110	3	11	12	1.5	8	1.5	0	45	2	based on 6 servings
Frisée Salad w/ Blue Cheese & Walnut Vinaigrette		210	160	5	8	18	5	6	6	15	380	1	based on 6 servings
Sautéed Spinach w/ Shallots		110	90	3	5	10	6	2.5	0.5	25	220	2	based on 6 servings
Orange-Scented Rice Pilaf w/ Fennel		260	60	6	44	7	4	2	0.5	15	180	1	based on 6 servings
Roasted Cornish Game Hens w/ Pesto & Goat Cheese		510	340	37	1	38	11	17	8	210	560	1	based on 6 servings
Rack of Lamb w/ Herb & Olive Crust		890	590	67	4	66	26	27	4.5	265	670	0	based on 6 servings
Back Cover													
Beer & Cheddar Fondue		380	250	23	6	27	17	8	1	90	450	0	based on 8 servings

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at Nutritional Solutions in Melville, New York. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the

calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used. When the

quantity of salt and pepper aren't specified, the analysis is based on ¼ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper per serving for entrées, and ⅛ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper per serving for side dishes.



**"Growing grapes is like any marriage.
The more you give, the more you get."**

— Stanton Lange, grower, Woodbridge Winery

www.woodbridgewines.com

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BY ROBERT MONDAVI

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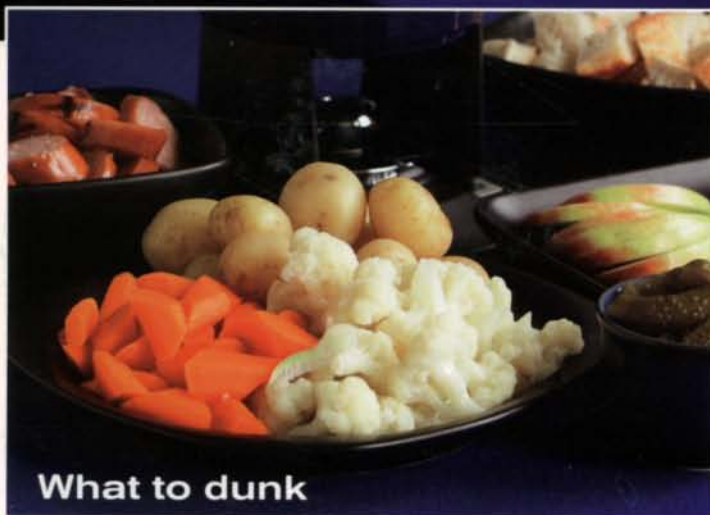


make it tonight



Festive fondue is quicker than you think

If fondue seems like a project, you might be surprised at just how easily it comes together. In fact, it's a perfect dish for casual entertaining, even on a busy weeknight. Just grab a fondue pot, set out a few of the dunking suggestions below, and invite friends over to dig in.



What to dunk

You can make cheese fondue a more balanced meal by serving some or all of the following as dipping options:

- ❖ Sourdough or ciabatta bread cubes
- ❖ Pear and apple slices

- ❖ Steamed carrots and cauliflower
- ❖ Boiled baby or fingerling potatoes
- ❖ Cornichons or baby pickles
- ❖ Grilled or broiled sliced sausage

Beer & Cheddar Fondue

Yields about 5 cups; serves six to eight.

Amontillado, a medium-dry sherry, provides a nice contrast to the bitter beer and the sharp cheddar.

- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- ½ small yellow onion, minced (about ⅓ cup)**
- 1 large clove garlic, minced**
- 12 oz. Emmentaler cheese, coarsely grated (about 3 lightly packed cups)**
- 8 oz. extra-sharp white Cheddar, coarsely grated (about 2 lightly packed cups)**
- 4 oz. Gruyère, coarsely grated (about 1 lightly packed cup)**
- 2 Tbs. cornstarch**
- 1 tsp. dry mustard (such as Coleman's)**
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 tsp. caraway seeds, coarsely ground in a spice grinder or with a mortar and pestle**
- 1 12-oz. can lager-style beer, preferably Budweiser**
- 3 Tbs. Amontillado sherry**
- Kosher salt**
- Dipping ingredients (at left)**

Melt the butter in a 1½- to 2-qt. flameproof fondue pot over medium-low heat. (If you don't have a fondue pot that's flameproof, use a heavy, narrow saucepan.) Add the onion

and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until completely soft and beginning to caramelize, 15 to 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, toss the Emmentaler, Cheddar, and Gruyère with the cornstarch, mustard, and pepper.

Add the caraway seeds to the pot and stir to toast them slightly, about 2 minutes. Add the beer, increase the heat to high, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium low and simmer to mellow the flavor of the beer, about 3 minutes.

Sprinkle the cheese mixture into the pot a large handful at a time, stirring each batch in a back and forth pattern so that the cheese doesn't ball up as it melts. Continue adding and stirring until all of the cheese is melted, smooth, and thick, adjusting the heat as necessary to maintain barely a simmer. Stir in the sherry and season to taste with salt. (If using a saucepan, transfer the fondue to a fondue pot.) Set the fondue pot over a low flame at the table to keep it warm. Serve with the dipping ingredients.

Allison Ehri is Fine Cooking's test kitchen associate and food stylist. ♦

For information on fondue pots, see *Where To Buy It* on p. 84.



THE BEST OF
fine
Cooking

12 Great Cookies

from 12 great years

COMPILED BY MARTHA HOLMBERG

Over the years, we've published scores of cookie recipes; all of them were good, but a handful really stood out from the crunchy crowd. They were the cookies we nibbled on most in the test kitchen (and brought back to our desks), the ones we baked for our own friends and families, and those that got special raves from our readers.

We've gathered a dozen of those stand-outs to share with you here. They cover the whole world of cookies, from delicate and sophisticated Toasted Almond Butter Thins to chewy Blondies to one of the best versions of a chocolate chip cookie you've ever had.

Bake just one or two or bake the whole selection for a big bash. You can't go wrong with any of them.



Making them beautiful

A holiday cookie has a special obligation to be not just delicious but pretty too, so it's worth taking a few extra measures to be sure each one is perfectly shaped and baked.

- ❖ Sounds boring, but be sure your oven is calibrated correctly. Just 25°F too hot or too cool can make a big difference with something that bakes so quickly.

- ❖ Use rimless baking sheets (not jelly roll pans) for better air flow, which means more even browning.

- ❖ Line your baking sheets with parchment for easy clean-up, for cookies that don't stick, and for speedy "production-line" baking without needing multiple baking sheets: While one batch is in the oven, arrange the next batch on a sheet of parchment. When the first batch is baked, slide the parchment from the baking sheet right onto the cooling rack, then slide the fresh batch of unbaked cookies onto the sheet and back into the oven.

- ❖ For sliced cookies, use a ruler to mark off your slices before cutting.

- ❖ For spreading bar-cookie dough in the pan, use a small offset spatula. It's great for smoothing fillings and icings, too.

- ❖ For evenly shaped drop cookies, use a spring-loaded ice cream scoop; you can find one in any size you need.



1994

Almond Biscotti

Yields about 3 dozen biscotti.

Why we love them: Unlike so many biscotti, which are downright hard, these are balanced between tender and crunchy, and the citrus zest and aniseed deliver an unexpected flavor lift.

7 oz. (1 1/3 cups) whole almonds, skin on
11 oz. (2 1/2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 2/3 cups granulated sugar
1/2 tsp. table salt
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. aniseed
Grated zest of 1 lemon, 1 lime, and 1 orange
3 large eggs plus 3 large egg yolks
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Heat the oven to 350°F. Toast the almonds on a baking sheet in the oven until they emit a nutty aroma but haven't turned dark brown inside, 10 to 15 minutes. Let cool.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), combine the flour, sugar, salt, baking powder, aniseed, and grated zests on medium-low speed.

In a separate bowl, lightly beat together the eggs, egg yolks, and va-

nilla extract with a whisk. With the mixer running on medium low, pour the egg mixture into the flour mixture. When the egg mixture is almost completely incorporated, reduce the speed to low, add the almonds and mix just until the dough comes together. Do not overmix. The dough will be stiff and sticky.

Dump the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and knead in by hand any remaining dry ingredients from the bottom of the bowl. Divide the dough into three equal parts. With floured hands, roll each part into a log about 10 inches long and 2 inches in diameter. Place the logs 4 inches apart on greased or parchment-lined baking sheets.

Bake the logs at 350°F until they're light brown but still soft, about 45 minutes. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and reduce the temperature to 300°F. Let the logs cool on the baking sheet for at least 10 minutes. Cut the logs on a slight diagonal into 3/4-inch-thick biscotti. Place the biscotti flat on the baking sheet and dry them in the oven until they offer resistance when pressed, but the cut side hasn't begun to darken, 10 to 15 minutes. Transfer to a rack to cool.

—Emily Luchetti, FC#5



1995

Raspberry Bars

Yields about 4 dozen bars.

Why we love them: When you bring a batch of these to an office party, everyone asks you for the recipe. And it's an easy cookie to whip up for a crowd because it takes only a few minutes to assemble, plus the baking time.

13 oz. (1 1/2 cups plus 2 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature; more for the pan
1 2/3 cups granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 lb. (3 1/2 cups) all-purpose flour
7 1/2 oz. hazelnuts, toasted and chopped (1 2/3 cups)
2 cups raspberry preserves

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 9x13-inch baking pan. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), cream the butter and sugar on medium speed until fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add the flour and mix just enough to incorporate. Add the nuts and mix a little longer until just blended.

Press about two-thirds of the mixture into the prepared pan. Spread with the raspberry preserves, then crumble the remaining dough on top. Bake until the top is lightly browned, about 1 hour. Put the pan on a rack to cool. Cut the bars into even 1 1/2-inch squares.

—Patricia Ann Heyman, FC#10



1996

Cocoa Walnut Butter Cookies

Yields about 4 dozen cookies.

Why we love them: The texture of these simple-to-bake cookies is like the fudgiest brownie but a touch more delicate, and the flavor's seriously chocolate. Who knew you could get that from cocoa powder?

4½ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour
½ cup natural or Dutch-processed cocoa
½ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. table salt
3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 oz. (2 Tbs.) vegetable shortening
½ cup packed brown sugar, sifted free of lumps
½ cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
About 4 oz. (¾ cup) chopped walnuts

Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment or foil. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the flour, cocoa, baking soda, baking powder, and salt. Mix thoroughly with a wire whisk. Set aside.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), beat the butter and shortening on medium speed until creamy. Add the sugars, beating until well combined. Beat in the egg and vanilla. Turn the mixer to low speed and mix in the flour mixture just until incorporated. Mix in the nuts.

Drop heaping teaspoonfuls of batter about 1½ inches apart on the prepared baking sheets. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. (After 5 minutes, swap the position of the baking sheets and rotate them 180 degrees for even baking.) The cookies will puff up and then settle down slightly when done. Cool on the baking sheets for a few minutes. With a metal spatula, transfer the cookies to a rack to cool completely.

—Alice Medrich, FC#17



1997

Coffee Thins

Yields about 28 cookies.

Why we love them: The brown sugar and espresso flavor is as sophisticated as it gets, so these are a treat for the grown-ups. You can keep a log of dough in the fridge for up to three days, baking just a few when friends drop by.

5½ oz. (1¼ cups) all-purpose flour
Pinch ground cinnamon
Pinch table salt
4 oz. (½ cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature
⅓ cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
1 tsp. instant coffee or espresso powder, dissolved in 2 tsp. coffee-flavored liqueur or water

Combine the flour, cinnamon, and salt in a small bowl. In a large bowl, beat the butter and brown sugar with a wooden spoon or an electric mixer until well blended; stir in the dissolved coffee. Add the flour mixture; mix until the dough is blended and begins to clump together (if you're using an electric mixer, set it on low speed). Pile the dough onto a large piece of plastic wrap. Using the wrap to help shape the dough, form it into a squared-off log 7 inches long. Chill until quite firm, at least 6 hours and up to 3 days.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Cut the dough in ¼-inch slices; set them 1 inch apart on parchment-lined baking sheets. Bake until the tops look dry and the edges are slightly browned, about 12 minutes. Transfer to a rack to cool completely.

—Abigail Johnson Dodge, FC#24



1998

Toasted Almond Butter Thins

Yields about 12 dozen cookies.

Why we love them: Here's your chance to have a Parisian Christmas, since these delicate, sophisticated cookies taste like they're straight from la pâtisserie.

9 oz. (2 cups) slivered almonds, toasted
4½ oz. (1 cup plus 2 Tbs.) cake flour
4½ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour
8 oz. (1 cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ tsp. table salt
10 oz. (2½ cups) confectioners' sugar
1 large egg, at room temperature

Combine the almonds and both flours in a bowl; set aside. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), cream the butter on medium speed until soft and creamy. Add the salt and confectioners' sugar; mix on medium-low speed until thoroughly combined, about 5 minutes, scraping the bowl as needed. Reduce the speed to low, add the egg, and mix until blended. Add the flour mixture; as soon as the dough comes together, stop the mixer.

Scrape the dough onto a large sheet of plastic wrap. Using the wrap to help shape and protect the dough, gently press it into a rectangle that's about 4½ by 8 inches and about 1½ inches thick. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until dough is firm enough to slice, at least 3 hours.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment. Unwrap the dough, trim the edges, and slice it into three 1½-inch-square logs. Slice each log into square cookies between ⅛ and ¼ inch thick. Lay the squares ½ inch apart on the baking sheet. Bake until lightly browned around the edges, about 8 minutes, rotating the sheet halfway through. Leave the cookies on the baking sheet until they're cool enough to handle (about 10 minutes), then transfer them to a rack to cool completely.

—Joanne Chang, FC#30



1999

Blondies

Yields sixteen 2-inch squares.

Why we love them: These are some of the chewiest blondies we know, with a mellow, toasted pecan-praline flavor. A scoop of vanilla ice cream on the plate turns one of these from a cookie into a full-fledged dessert.

4 oz. (½ cup) unsalted butter; more for the pan
1½ cups firmly packed dark brown sugar
1 large egg plus 1 large egg yolk, at room temperature
1½ tsp. pure vanilla extract
5 oz. (1 cup plus 2 Tbs.) all-purpose flour
Scant ¼ tsp. table salt
2 oz. pecans, toasted and coarsely chopped (¾ cup)

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, heat the butter and brown sugar, stirring frequently, until the sugar has dissolved. Cook, stirring, about 1 minute longer—the mixture will bubble but should not boil. Set the pan aside to cool for about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, butter an 8-inch square pan, line the pan bottom with parchment (or waxed paper), then butter the parchment.

Stir the egg, egg yolk, and vanilla into the cooled sugar mixture. Add the flour, salt, and nuts, stirring just until blended. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake until the center is springy when touched (the top may still look doughy) and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean or with a few moist crumbs clinging to it, 25 to 35 minutes.

Set the pan on a rack until it's cool enough to handle. Run a paring knife around the inside edge of the pan, then invert the pan onto a flat surface and peel off the parchment. Flip the baked blondie back onto the rack to cool completely. Cut into squares with a sharp knife.

—Cindy Mitchell, FC#34



2000

Sugar Cookies

Yields about 4 dozen 2½-inch cookies.

Why we love them: The generous amount of butter and the bright hit of lemon zest in these versatile cookies takes them far above your standard sugar cookie. We love them layered with jam for a pretty “stained glass” look.

14 oz. (1¾ cups) unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ cup granulated sugar
1½ tsp. finely grated lemon zest
½ tsp. table salt
1 large egg
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1 lb. 5 oz. (4⅔ cups) all-purpose flour

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), combine the butter, sugar, zest, and salt. Beat on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add the egg and vanilla extract and beat until well blended. With the mixer on low speed, mix in the flour in three additions until blended.

Spread the dough about 1 inch thick on a baking sheet, cover with plastic wrap, and

chill until firm, about 1 hour. You can refrigerate the dough, wrapped well, for up to a week.

When ready to roll, heat the oven to 350°F and line two baking sheets with parchment. Cut the sheet of dough in half; keep half in the refrigerator and let the other half soften just slightly.

Generously flour your work surface. Roll the dough to an even ¼-inch thickness. Dust off excess flour with a clean, dry pastry brush. With a cookie cutter that's about 2½ inches in diameter, cut out shapes and transfer them to the baking sheets, setting them about 1 inch apart. Carefully press the scraps together, reroll, and cut. Repeat with the other half of the dough.

Bake until the edges turn golden, 15 to 20 minutes (you will need to bake the cookies in two batches). Leave to cool on the baking sheet.

Stained Glass cookie variation, pictured above (yields about 2 dozen sandwich cookies): When cutting out the dough, use a smaller (about 1-inch diameter) cookie cutter to cut out the centers of half of the cookies (you can reroll those scraps, too, or just bake them as cookie “buttons”). Bake as directed above.

When cool, turn the solid cookies bottom-side up and evenly spread 1½ to 2 teaspoons of colorful fruit preserves over each (you'll need about ¾ cup preserves total). Top each solid cookie with a cut-out cookie and press lightly to join. Dust lightly with confectioners' sugar, if using.

You can make the cookies several days ahead, but don't fill them until the day you're going to serve them, because they'll soften.

—Melissa Murphy Hagenbart, FC#42

[Download](http://finecooking.com) a cookie troubleshooting guide at finecooking.com



2001

Peanut Butter Sandwich Cookies

Yields eighteen 2½-inch sandwiches.

Why we love them: Ordinary peanut butter cookies can be a snooze, frankly, but these are more like a dream, with their creamy-crunchy peanut and chocolate filling.

FOR THE COOKIES:

6 oz. (1⅓ cups) all-purpose flour
2 oz. (½ cup) cake flour
½ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. table salt
6 oz. (¾ cup) unsalted butter, completely softened at room temperature
¾ cup smooth peanut butter
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1 large egg

FOR THE FILLING:

1½ cups confectioners' sugar
3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
¾ cup smooth peanut butter
3 Tbs. heavy cream
¼ cup coarsely chopped unsalted peanuts
¼ cup coarsely chopped semisweet chocolate, or mini semisweet chocolate chips

Make the cookies: Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment. In a medium bowl, sift together the two flours, baking soda, and salt. In a stand mixer fitted

with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), cream the butter, peanut butter, and sugars on medium speed until light and fluffy. Add the vanilla and egg; continue beating until smooth and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Stir in the flour mixture by hand just until it's incorporated; don't overmix or the cookies will be tough.

Drop heaping tablespoonfuls of batter, spaced about 2 inches apart, onto the lined baking sheets. With floured fingers, flatten each dab of batter into a 2-inch round. Bake until the cookies are puffed and golden, 12 to 14 minutes, rotating the baking sheets if necessary for even baking. Transfer the cookies to a rack to cool.

Make the filling while the cookies cool: In a small bowl, cream the confectioners' sugar, butter, and peanut butter until smooth. Add the heavy cream; continue creaming until smooth and fluffy. Stir in the chopped peanuts and chocolate.

Assemble: Transfer the cooled cookies to a work surface, flipping half of them over. With an offset spatula or a butter knife, spread a scant teaspoon of filling onto each turned-over cookie. Set another wafer on top of each filled cookie, pressing gently to spread the filling.

—Linda Weber, FC#43



2002

Chewy Cranberry-Oatmeal Cookies

Yields about forty-six 3-inch cookies.

Why we love them: "Chewy" is an apt description of these cookies (a touch of honey adds moistness), made more interesting by the tangy ruby-red nuggets of cranberry that replace the traditional raisin.

6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. table salt
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
2½ cups old-fashioned oats
8 oz. (1 cup) unsalted butter, slightly softened
1 cup packed light brown sugar
½ cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 Tbs. honey
2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
6 oz. (1⅓ cups) dried cranberries
5 oz. (about 1 cup) chopped walnuts

Heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease two cookie sheets or line them with parchment. In a medium bowl, mix the flour, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon; stir in the oats.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), beat the butter and both sugars on medium speed until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, then scrape down the sides of the bowl; add the honey and vanilla and beat until blended. Add the flour mixture in two additions, beating until well combined. Stir in the cranberries and walnuts.

Drop the dough by heaping tablespoonfuls about 2 inches apart onto the cookie sheets until the sheets are full (you'll need to bake the cookies in two batches). Bake until the centers of the cookies are soft and no longer look wet, 9 to 11 minutes, rotating the sheets if necessary for even browning. Repeat with the remaining dough. Let the cookies cool on the sheets for 5 minutes; transfer to a rack to cool completely.

—Elaine Khosrova, FC#54



2003

Orange-Hazelnut Shortbread Cookies

Yields about 3 dozen 2-inch cookies.

Why we love them: The combination of a buttery-sandy texture and zingy orange-zest flavor is addictive. And the cookies get even better after a day or two in a tin, so they're great to bake for gifts.

8 oz. (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
½ cup granulated sugar
½ tsp. table salt
10 oz. (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour
2½ oz. (½ cup) blanched hazelnuts, toasted and ground very finely in a food processor
2 tsp. (loosely packed) finely grated orange zest (from 1 orange)

Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), combine the butter, sugar, and salt; mix on low speed until the butter combines with the sugar but isn't perfectly smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the flour, ground hazelnuts, and zest; mix on low speed, scraping the bowl frequently, until the dough has just about pulled together, about 3 minutes; don't overmix.

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough evenly to about ¼ inch thick. Cut the dough into bars or squares with a sharp knife or, using cookie cutters, cut out shapes as close to one another as possible. Press the scraps together, roll them out, and cut out more cookies. If the dough becomes sticky, refrigerate it briefly. Arrange the cookies on the parchment-lined baking sheets and refrigerate until chilled, at least 20 minutes.

Bake the cookies until golden on the bottom and edges and pale to golden on top, 30 minutes to 1 hour. (After 15 minutes, swap the position of the baking sheets and rotate them 180 degrees for even baking.) If the cookies are done before 30 minutes, reduce the oven temperature to 275°F for the remaining batches; if they take longer than 1 hour, increase the temperature to 325°F. Transfer the cookies to a rack and cool completely.

—Carolyn Weil, FC#61



2004

Chocolate Chunk Cookies

Yields about 40 cookies.

Why we love them: This recipe may become your permanent chocolate chip cookie recipe. We love the double hit of chocolate chunks—milk for richness, bittersweet for sophistication.

9½ oz. (2 cups plus 2 Tbs.) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. table salt
8 oz. (1 cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ cup granulated sugar
¾ cup plus 2 Tbs. very firmly packed light brown sugar
2 large eggs
½ tsp. pure vanilla extract
9 oz. bittersweet chocolate, coarsely chopped (about 2 cups)
2½ oz. milk chocolate, coarsely chopped (about ¾ cup)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, and salt to blend. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), beat the butter, sugar, and brown sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, 4 to 5 minutes. Scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula. Beat in the eggs and vanilla until thoroughly combined, about 2 minutes. Scrape the bowl again. With the mixer on low speed, slowly blend in the flour until incorporated, about 30 seconds. Fold in the chopped chocolate by hand with the spatula, making sure all the flour and butter are thoroughly combined.

Drop the dough by rounded tablespoonfuls about 3 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheets. Bake until the cookies are golden brown on the edges and slightly soft in the center, about 15 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheet for 1 minute before transferring them to a rack to cool completely.

—Joanne Chang, FC#68



2005

Double-Ginger Crackles

Yields about 4 dozen cookies.

Why we love them: These are the essence of a holiday ginger cookie: beautifully crackled sugary surface, moist and chewy center, and the warming zing of ginger. Cheers!

10 oz. (2¼ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
2¾ tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. table salt
6 oz. (¾ cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature
1⅓ cups granulated sugar
1 large egg, at room temperature
¼ cup molasses
3 Tbs. finely chopped crystallized ginger

Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line two large cookie sheets with parchment or nonstick baking liners.

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, ground ginger, baking soda, and salt. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), beat the butter and 1 cup of the sugar on medium-high speed until well blended. Add the egg, molasses, and crystallized ginger; beat well. Add the dry ingredients and mix on low speed until well blended.

Pour the remaining ⅓ cup sugar into a shallow bowl. Using a 1-tablespoon cookie scoop, a small ice cream scoop, or two tablespoons, shape the dough into 1-inch balls. Roll each ball in the sugar to coat. Set the balls 1½ to 2 inches apart on the prepared cookie sheets.

Bake, rotating the sheets halfway through baking, until the cookies are puffed and the bottoms are lightly browned, 12 to 14 minutes. If you touch a cookie, it should feel dry on the surface but soft inside. The surface cracks will look a bit wet. Let the cookies sit on the cookie sheet for 5 minutes, then transfer them to a rack to cool completely.

—Abigail Johnson Dodge, FC#75

BY MOLLY STEVENS

Simplify your holiday entertaining

with this boldly flavored mix-and-match menu. Start with a flaky savory tart—perfect with a glass of sparkling wine—and then choose one salad, one main dish, and one side dish from the recipes here. Each takes less than 45 minutes to prepare, and while the main dish is in the oven, the side dish comes together on the stove. To minimize last-minute stress, you can bake the pastry for the tart, make the salad dressing, and get as many of the other ingredients as you like prepped (section the grapefruit for the arugula and radicchio salad, for example) well before your guests arrive.

Mix-and-match menu ideas

Arugula & Radicchio Salad
with Ruby Grapefruit &
Toasted Almonds

Sautéed Spinach with Shallots

Roasted Cornish Game Hens
with Pesto & Goat Cheese



Frisée Salad with Blue Cheese,
Dried Cherries & Walnut
Vinaigrette

Orange-Scented Rice Pilaf
with Fennel

Rack of Lamb with Herb &
Olive Crust



Sun-Dried Tomato Tart with Fontina & Prosciutto

Serves six to eight.

1 large egg yolk

**All-purpose flour as needed
for rolling out dough**

**1 sheet frozen puff-pastry
(about 8 oz.), thawed
according to package
directions**

**¼ cup finely chopped
oil-packed sun-dried
tomatoes**

**½ cup grated Fontina
(about 2 oz.)**

**4 thin slices prosciutto
(preferably imported,
about 2 oz.), cut crosswise
into thin strips**

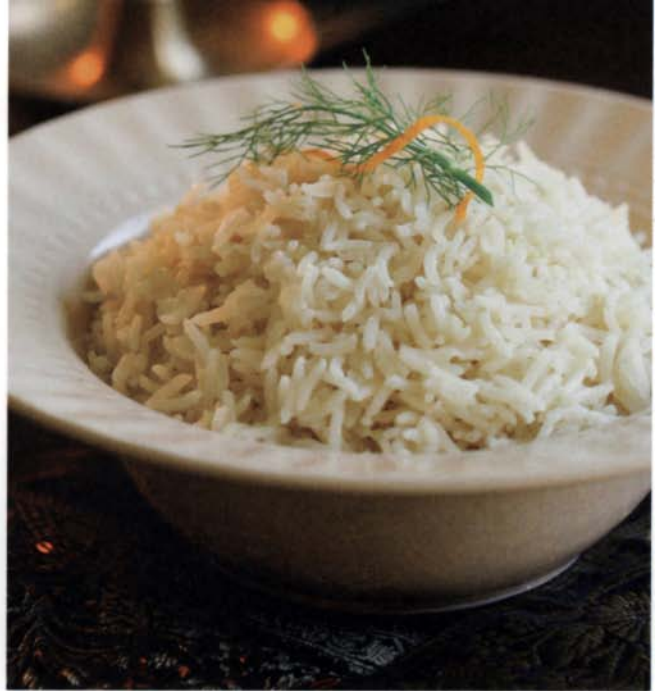
**2 to 3 Tbs. freshly grated
Parmigiano-Reggiano**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment. Whisk the egg yolk with ½ tsp. water.

Lightly dust a work surface with flour and gently unfold the pastry sheet. Roll out the pastry, eliminating the creases, to a 10- by 14-inch rectangle. Cut the rectangle in half lengthwise to make two 5- by 14-inch rectangles, and if the edges are uneven or ragged, trim them. Transfer

both pastries to the baking sheet. With the tines of a fork, press a ¼-inch border around the edge of the pastry. Brush the egg mixture along the border (you will not need all of it). Poke the rest of the pastry all over with the fork to keep the pastry from puffing too much. Bake both pastry rectangles until firm and golden, about 12 minutes. Remove the pastry from the oven and increase the temperature to 475°F.

Let the pastry rectangles cool slightly and press them gently to flatten any large air pockets. Scatter a thin layer of the sun-dried tomatoes on both rectangles. Scatter the Fontina over the top. Place the prosciutto strips on top of the Fontina, either draping them in a random pattern or arranging them evenly. Sprinkle the top with the Parmigiano. Bake until the cheese has melted, about 5 minutes. Let cool for a few minutes, then cut into strips or small squares to serve.



Sautéed Spinach with Shallots

Serves six.

- 5 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- ¼ cup finely chopped shallots**
- ¾ tsp. ground coriander (preferably from toasted and freshly ground seeds)**
- Pinch crushed red pepper flakes**
- 1¼ lb. spinach (two 10-oz. bags), stemmed and thoroughly washed but not dried**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper (preferably white pepper)**
- Pinch freshly grated nutmeg, or to taste**

Heat the butter in a large (12-inch) skillet over medium heat. Add the shallot, coriander, and red pepper flakes, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the shallot begins to

soften but does not brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Increase the heat to medium high, and begin adding the spinach, a large handful at a time, tossing with tongs, until all the spinach is in the skillet. Cook, tossing frequently, until the spinach is wilted and bright green, about 2 minutes. If a lot of water remains, cook on high heat, until the leaves are coated with butter but not soupy, another 1 to 2 minutes. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and nutmeg.

Tip: Swiss chard leaves (stemmed) would make a fine substitution for the spinach in this recipe.

Orange-Scented Rice Pilaf with Fennel

Serves six.

- 3 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- ¾ cup finely chopped fennel (½ small bulb)**
- ½ cup finely chopped onion (1 small onion)**
- 1½ cups long-grain rice, preferably basmati**
- 2¾ cups low-salt chicken broth**
- 2 strips orange zest**
- 1 bay leaf**
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt**

Melt the butter over medium heat in a medium (3-qt.) saucepan. Add the fennel and onion and cook, stirring often, until softened, about 6 minutes. Add the rice and

cook, stirring, until the grains are glossy and beginning to crackle, about 2 minutes. Add the broth, orange zest, bay leaf, and salt. Bring to a boil, cover, and lower the heat to a simmer. Simmer until the rice is tender and all the liquid has been absorbed, about 17 minutes. Off the heat, remove the lid, lay a kitchen towel over the pot, replace the lid, and let sit for 5 to 10 minutes. Fluff the rice with a fork and serve.

Tip: The rice can sit, covered, for up to 30 minutes before serving.



Rack of Lamb with Herb & Olive Crust

Serves six.

⅓ cup very coarsely chopped pitted Kalamata, picholine, or Manzanilla olives, or a mix

¼ cup very coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1½ tablespoons fresh thyme

2 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped

Pinch crushed red pepper flakes

1½ tablespoons mayonnaise

2 racks of lamb (7 to 8 ribs each), trimmed, or frenched

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

¾ cup fresh breadcrumbs

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

Combine the olives, parsley, thyme, garlic, and red pepper flakes in a mini food processor or a mortar. Process or pound with a pestle to a rough paste. Stir in the mayonnaise. Set aside.

If there is more than a thin layer of fat left on the racks of lamb, trim it so that only a thin layer remains. Do not remove all the fat. Heat a large, heavy skillet (cast iron works very well; don't use a nonstick pan) over high heat. Season one rack with salt and pepper and set it in the hot skillet, meat

side down. When the surface is nicely browned, about 2 minutes, turn the rack with tongs and brown the bottom for another 2 minutes. Remove and repeat with the second rack. If necessary, reduce the heat to medium high.

Spread the breadcrumbs in a pie plate. Coat the surface of the lamb with the olive paste, then roll the meat in the breadcrumbs, pressing the crumbs so they adhere. Arrange the racks, bone-side down, in a roasting pan (you may need to interlock the bone ends to make them fit). Wrap the tips of the bones with a strip of foil so they don't burn.

Roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the meat reads 120° to 125°F for rare or 130° to 135°F for medium rare, 20 to 25 minutes (the temperature will rise about another 5°F once it's out of the oven). Let the lamb rest for about 5 minutes. Cut down between the bones to carve into chops, then serve.



Roasted Cornish Game Hens with Pesto & Goat Cheese

Serves six.

6 Tbs. homemade or prepared basil pesto

⅓ cup fresh goat cheese (about 2½ oz.), at room temperature

3 large Cornish game hens (1½ to 2 lb. each), giblets removed

1½ Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

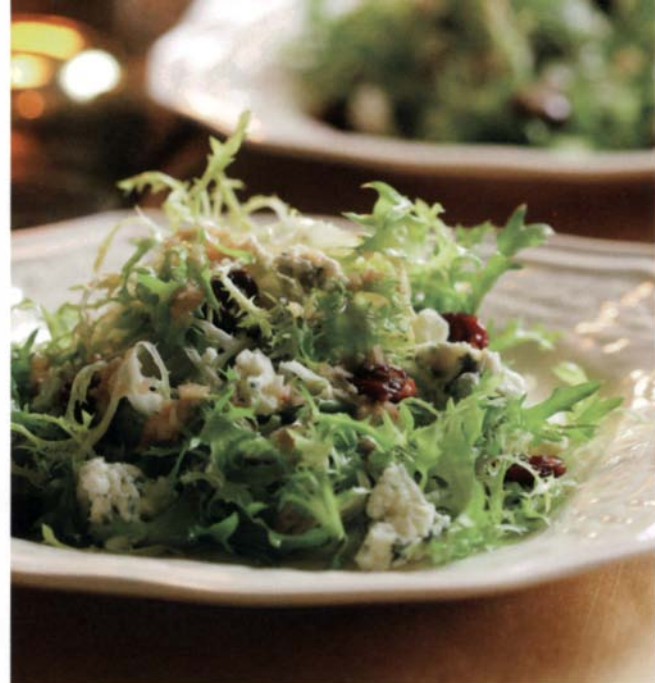
Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F. Arrange a large wire rack over a large rimmed baking sheet or shallow roasting pan. In a small bowl, combine the pesto and goat cheese, mashing it with a fork until evenly mixed.

Place a hen, breast-side down, on a cutting board. Remove the backbone by cutting along both sides with poultry shears. Flip the hen and flatten it by pressing down on the breastbone with your palms. With a chef's knife, split the hen in two along the breastbone. Extend the wings on each side, and chop off the last two joints.

Remove and discard any large deposits of fat. Repeat with the remaining hens.

With your fingers, loosen the skin over the breast and leg. Insert a heaping tablespoon of the pesto mixture under the skin, and work it so it evenly covers the breast and leg meat. Smooth the skin back to its original position and repeat with the remaining hens. The hens may be prepared up to this point and refrigerated for several hours.

Arrange the hens on the large wire rack. They should not overlap. Brush the surface of the hens with the olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast the hens, rotating the pan about halfway through, until they're nicely browned and the juices run clear when a thigh is pricked with a skewer or toothpick, about 30 minutes. Cover loosely with foil and allow to rest for about 5 minutes before serving.



Frisée Salad with Blue Cheese, Dried Cherries & Walnut Vinaigrette

Serves six.

1/3 cup dried tart cherries
2 Tbs. minced shallot (about 1 medium shallot)
2 Tbs. sherry vinegar
1 tsp. Dijon mustard
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
6 Tbs. walnut oil
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 large head frisée (about 8 oz.), torn into bite-size pieces, washed and spun dry
4 oz. good-quality blue cheese, crumbled (about 1 cup)

In a small bowl, soak the dried cherries in 1/2 cup hot water until plumped, 5 to 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, in another small bowl, combine the shallot, vinegar, and mustard.

Season with salt and pepper, and whisk to combine. Drizzle in the walnut oil, whisking as you go, followed by the olive oil. Drag a piece of frisée through the vinaigrette and taste for seasoning.

Drain the cherries. Put the frisée in a large bowl. Pour on about two-thirds of the vinaigrette and toss to coat. Add more vinaigrette if needed to evenly but lightly coat the leaves (you may not need all of it). Arrange the frisée on six salad plates. Top each with some of the blue cheese and dried cherries, and serve.

Note: I like Maytag blue cheese or Great Hill Blue for this salad.



Arugula & Radicchio Salad with Ruby Grapefruit & Toasted Almonds

Serves six.

2 medium ruby grapefruit
1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
2 tsp. honey
1/4 tsp. kosher salt
6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbs. chopped fresh mint, plus leaves for garnish
6 to 8 large handfuls arugula, tough stems removed (about 8 oz.)
1 head radicchio, cored and cut into strips
1/3 cup sliced almonds, toasted

With a sharp knife, cut away both ends of one of the grapefruit. Stand the fruit on one of its cut ends and slice off the skin in strips (try to get all the bitter white pith). Working over a bowl, cut the segments free from the membrane, letting each segment fall into the bowl as you go. When you've removed all the segments, squeeze the membrane to extract all the juice. Repeat with the second fruit. Spoon out the grapefruit

segments from the bowl and set them aside on a plate. Remove any seeds from the juice.

Measure out 3 Tbs. juice into a small bowl. Save the rest for another use (or drink it). Whisk the lime juice, honey, and salt into the grapefruit juice. Whisk in the oil and then the chopped mint. Drag an arugula leaf through the vinaigrette and taste for seasoning. Drizzle about 1 Tbs. of the vinaigrette over the grapefruit segments.

Combine the arugula and radicchio in a large bowl. Toss with enough of the vinaigrette to evenly but lightly coat the leaves (you may not need all of it). Arrange the greens on six salad plates and garnish with the grapefruit segments, almonds, and a few mint leaves.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking and the author of All About Braising: The Art of Uncomplicated Cooking, 2005 winner of the James Beard Foundation award for best single-subject cookbook. ♦